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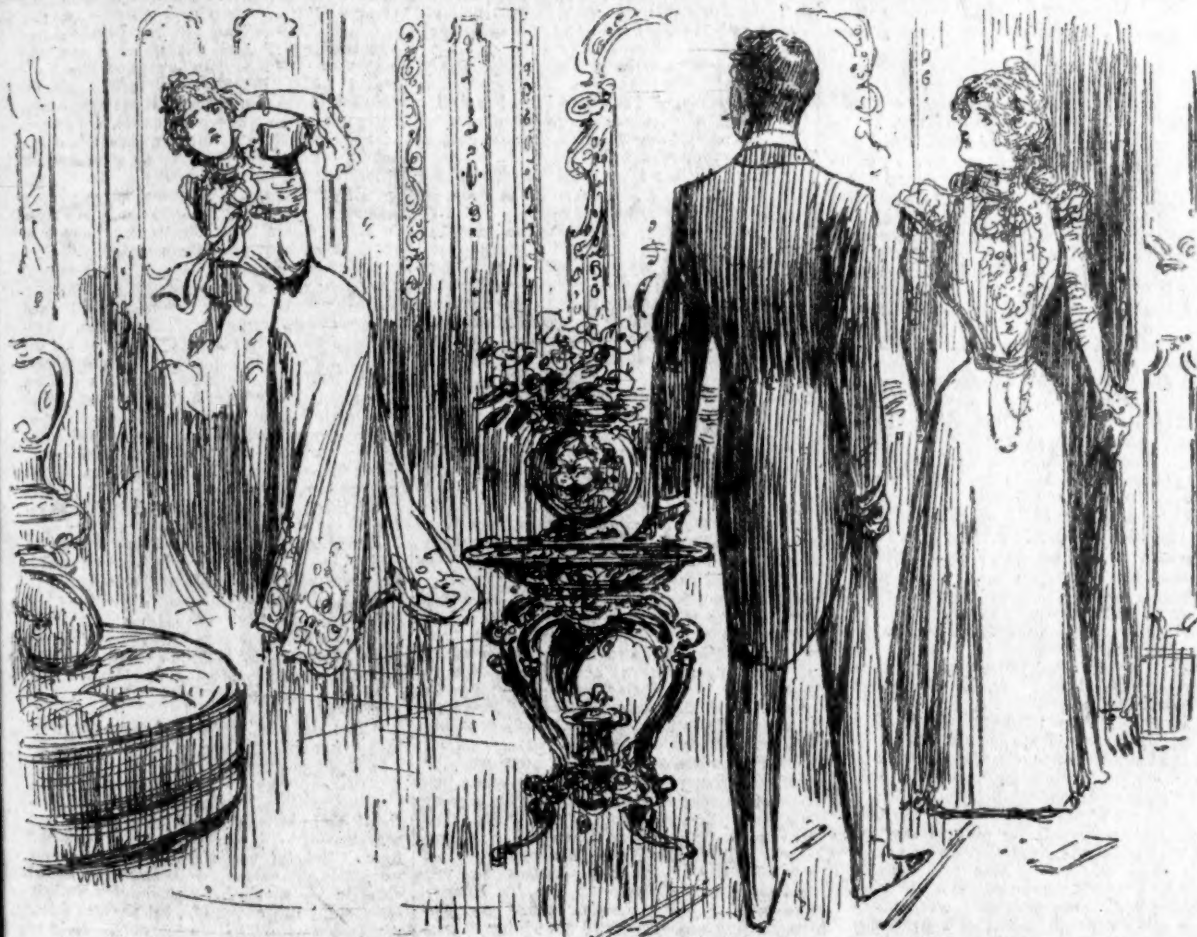
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FOR THE WEEK ENDING JUNE 7, 1902.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"YOUR NAME IS NOT MONICA BURN, AND INSTEAD OF BEING A SINGLE GIRL YOU ARE A MARRIED WOMAN, WHOSE HUSBAND IS STILL LIVING!" SAID CHRISTABEL, TRIUMPHANTLY.

A RASH MARRIAGE

By the author of "A Golden Destiny," "Victor's Fate," "Hester's Secret," etc., etc.

[A NOVELETTE.]

(COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.)

CHAPTER I.

A MAY morning, delicious with the warmth of summer and freshness of spring—the trees in the tender verdure of their early green, the birds singing in untired chorus, in harmonious accord of beauty, and Hyde Park looking its very best, in brave array of grass and flowers.

In the Row people of both sexes were enjoying their morning ride—fair young English maidens, handsome men, and a sprinkling of children; but the Park itself was almost deserted. One seat, surrounding a large tree, had an occupant who might possibly have aroused some interest had there been anyone to notice her, for she was very young, possessed a slight, graceful figure, and wore a thick veil, which fully answered its purpose of concealing her features. There was something peculiar, too, in her attitude—a quiet thoughtfulness, almost amounting to dejection, as she fixed her eyes on the path, where, quite unconsciously, she was tracing meaningless figures with the end of her parasol.

So absorbed was she in her reflections that she did not notice two gentlemen coming

from the opposite direction, who paused in front of her, and then seated themselves on the same seat—but on the other side of the tree; so that, although she heard the hum of their voices as they conversed, she was unable to see their faces.

They were both young, both handsome, and both possessed that nameless air of distinction which, while it cannot be described, invariably makes itself felt as an irresistible influence on those with whom its owners chance to be brought into contact. They either seemed not to have observed, or to have forgotten the presence of the girl on the other side of the tree, for they presently fell into a confidential strain, which was certainly not intended for the ears of a third person.

"You are going to India next month, then,

Chisholm?" said the elder of the two, in an interrogative tone.

"Yes."

"And you'll probably be away some years?"

"I suppose so."

"How do you like the idea of leaving England?" pursued the first speaker, whose name was Molyneux, and who was an officer in the Guards.

The other shrugged his shoulders, and smiled significantly.

"To tell you the truth, Molyneux," he said, "I should welcome the idea of leaving my native land for some reasons, although, of course, there are others that make me regret it. The fact is," a moody expression came on his face, "I am in a deuce of a mess, and the devil only knows how I shall get out of it."

"Money, do you mean?" asked Molyneux. His companion nodded a gloomy assent.

"Won't your uncle do anything for you?" he continued, after a moment's silence.

"I will not ask him!" exclaimed Chisholm, energetically. "A fellow has no right to sponge on his relatives, and I should think myself the most arrant cur in the world if I applied to Lord Seagrave. He has two sons of his own, remember, and I will have quite enough to do with his money. No, I have got myself into these difficulties, and I must get out as best I can. I staked everything on that horse of mine for the Grand National. I was so sure he would win that I confidently anticipated making enough to pay my debts over and over again; and then the wretched jockey played the fool with me, and the horse did not even get a place!"

"Not an uncommon occurrence, by any means," observed Molyneux, drily. "By the way, Chisholm, I have a thousand pounds lying idle, and if it is any use to you you may have it, and welcome."

Chisholm wrung his hand gratefully.

"You are a good fellow, Molyneux! and I am—well, to say the least, deeply sensible of the kindness of your offer, but I cannot take advantage of it. The truth is, a thousand pounds would do me no good whatever. The least I can manage with would be ten times that amount!"

"Whew!" whistled the elder man. Then, after a pause of reflection, he added, "But how shall you get it?"

"I wish I knew!" exclaimed Chisholm. "I used no figure of speech when I told you my affairs were desperate, for that is really the case; and, upon my word, I see no remedy except a bullet through my brain!"

"Nonsense!"

"It's all very well for you to say 'nonsense'; but, indeed, the alternative has seriously suggested itself to me; and, I tell you candidly I would rather adopt it than leave England a dishonoured man—unable to pay those debts which it is one of a gentleman's first duties to discharge!"

There was a ring of sincerity in his voice, which made his listeners—for there were two—feel an uncomfortable conviction that his threat meant something more than mere bravado.

"You should marry a rich wife," said Molyneux, presently. "Your good looks and position would be an equivalent for her money."

"By Jove! I wish I could find a woman who would take that view! I would propose to her like a shot, though she were as ugly as sin! and yet," he added, with a shudder, "I look upon ugly women as blots on the creation, and could never see the object of their existence!"

At that moment some ladies passed, who bowed to Molyneux; and he, with a hasty excuse, sprang up and followed them, leaving Chisholm alone with his meditations—which, it was plainly to be seen, were of a very unpleasant nature.

About five minutes later a shadow fell on

the path, and, looking up, he saw before him a slim, girlish figure, dressed in black, and wearing a thick veil over her face. Her hands were clasped tightly together, and it struck him that she had intended speaking to him, but could not summon sufficient courage to do so.

"Can I do anything for you?" he said, courteously, removing his hat, and forgetting his troubles in a momentary curiosity.

"You can—perhaps," she returned, in a low, half-strangled tone that she vainly endeavoured to make firm. "I wish to explain to you that I have overheard the conversation that has taken place between you and the gentleman who has just left. Is it true?"

"Is what true?" he asked, greatly puzzled both at her words and manner, and half inclined to believe that she must be an escaped lunatic.

"That you are in difficulties—pecuniary difficulties?"

"That, madam," he said, a little haughtily, "is a matter that cannot possibly concern you, and such being the case, I must decline to answer your question."

"You are wrong!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "It concerns me a great deal, or may do so, and I implore you to answer me."

He laughed, but nevertheless humoured her fancy.

"Well, then, I am quite willing to confess that I am in debt, though why you should wish to be informed on such a point passes my comprehension," he replied, peering at her curiously, and wondering what kind of features were hidden behind the surrounding gauze.

"And you are anxious to obtain ten thousand pounds?" she went on, ignoring his last remark.

"Ten thousand pounds would be of great use to me. In fact, I would give ten years of my life if by so doing I could obtain such a sum; but I may as well expect the moon to fall at my feet," he added, switching his boot with his cane, and speaking more to himself than to her.

"Listen!" she said, speaking very quickly, but in a perfectly distinct voice, while her slender fingers twisted in and out of each other with a nervous movement which bore witness to the intense excitement under which she was labouring. "I have a suggestion to make, which, if you accept, will put you in possession of the sum you require. You look at me as if you thought I was mad—probably you do think so; but you are wrong, for I am in my sober senses, and know quite well the meaning of every word I utter. I have a fortune of fifty thousand pounds; and, for reasons which I will presently explain, I wish to be married, so that I may have control of my money. By saying I wish to marry, I do not mean I wish to live with my husband, or even to be on friendly terms with him, but I desire the position and protection which marriage can give me, and in return I am willing to pay the sum of ten thousand pounds. Do you understand me?"

To judge from the expression with which he regarded her, it did not seem as if he did; but she, without giving him time to reply—perhaps, too, because she did not wish to give herself time for repentance of a deed that was, to say the least, rash—continued rapidly:

"I will explain my position, and then you shall judge for yourself. I am an orphan, and my father left me the fortune I have told you of, and which I am to inherit when I am twenty-one, or when I marry. My stepmother was made my guardian until I attain my majority, and she has resolved upon my marrying her own son by a former marriage. Do you understand the position?"

He nodded gravely. If she were mad, there was at least method in her madness.

"Well, my stepmother took me down into the country, to a lonely old house, miles away from any other habitation, and has since then subjected me to a course of persecution, whose object was to get me to marry her son. I

steadily refused, but"—she lowered her voice to a whisper and looked round, as if to assure herself that there was no possibility of her words being overheard—"I grew frightened, for she is a resolute woman, and told me outright that she would make me marry William Compton, so last night I ran away."

"Have you no friends to whom you could go?" he inquired, as she paused, and in spite of himself he felt interested in her story, even while he reflected on the possibility of its being all imagination.

"I have no friends. My father was an only child, and my mother's sisters and brothers all died in infancy, so I have no relatives except very distant ones, who know nothing of me, and care less. I am quite alone, and at present I have hardly any money, so that unless I do something in the meantime my stepmother will find out where I am, and compel me to return to her guardianship. I would rather die than go back!" she exclaimed, with an energy that was almost fierce; "and so I have resolved on a desperate measure, which is nothing more nor less than to marry, and by that means secure myself from William Compton."

"But," he said, "it seems to me you are jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire—in other words, you are running away from the risk of marriage into a certainty."

"No—or, at least, I do not look upon it in that light, for if I married William Compton I should have to live with him all my life and endure the daily disgust of his caresses, whereas in the marriage I contemplate I and my husband would have nothing to do with each other, for he would have to sign a deed on our wedding-day renouncing every right to live with me, and we should henceforth be strangers to each other. Do you think it strange I should take you into my confidence, then?" she asked, with a sort of wistfulness in her voice.

"I think it very strange indeed," he returned, gravely.

Her fingers trembled more than ever at the reply; she could not possibly have expected it to be different, and yet it unnerved her.

"I have been impulsive in my likes and dislikes all my life," she said, quickly, "and directly I saw your face I thought it was one to be trusted. Then I overheard your conversation, and it suggested the idea—"

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Seventeen."

"And do you really and earnestly mean that you would like me to marry you on the conditions you have named?"

"Yes."

There was a silence of a few minutes' duration. Man of the world as he was, and accustomed to duplicity in every shape and form, Chisholm yet believed implicitly every word the girl uttered, and, moreover, he had come to the conclusion that she was perfectly sane, and quite aware of what she was doing.

"Your proposal is a very serious one," he said, presently, "and I, who am eight years older than you, can estimate its consequences much better than you could possibly do. You know nothing of me—"

"I know you are a gentleman, and I believe you are to be trusted," she interrupted.

He bowed gravely.

"Thank you for such a good opinion. Although I cannot be as candid as you have been, I may tell you I am deeply burdened with debt. I am regarded by everyone who knows me as a dissipated gambler. I am—"

"That matters nothing to me. I simply want the protection of your name, and your character does not affect me in the least."

He was rather agitated at this declaration.

"Another consideration," he went on, "is that the time may come when you will see someone you will love, and then this hasty marriage will become a hateful tie."

"I am willing to take the risk," she said, steadily. "In effect, such a marriage as I speak of is my only way of escape, and I must embrace it, whatever the consequences

may be. If I do not marry you I must marry someone else on the same terms."

Again he was very thoughtful, then he said:

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Carlton Hotel."

"And what is your name?"

"Helena Markham. My father's name was Cyrus Markham, and he was a contractor."

"I have heard of him," Chisholm said, shortly.

Aristocratic to the tips of his fingers, it cannot be said that an alliance with the daughter of a contractor commended itself to him in any especial degree, and yet—those debts!

"Will you let me see your face?" he asked.

For answer she raised her veil, and he saw a pair of large dark eyes, tremulous lips, thin and very pale cheeks—features that in themselves were pleasing, though immature, but whose chief expression was one of resolute determination such as is seldom seen in a girl so young. She was not beautiful, but she possessed a gift almost as great as beauty—a singular refinement that at once stamped her as one of Nature's gentlewomen.

Almost immediately she lowered her veil, and said, interrogatively:

"Well?"

"Will you give me a few hours for reflection—say until five o'clock?" he asked.

"Yes, and if you like, I will meet you here at that time, and you can give me your answer."

She made a slight inclination of her head, and turning round, walked away towards the Marble Arch, with quick, decisive footsteps, like a woman who not only has a purpose, but is determined to pursue it.

He watched her as long as she was in sight, and then left the Park, and went along Piccadilly into the Strand.

CHAPTER II.

England is a free country—so free, that for the modest sum of one shilling any man or woman may acquire themselves with the full particulars of the last will and testament of such deceased friends or neighbours in whom they take an interest.

For the first time in his life Vane Chisholm availed himself of this liberty, and went to Somerset House, where he paid his shilling, and was presented with a book, in which he found a copy of the will of Cyrus Markham, proved by his widow, who was the executrix.

The testator declared himself to be possessed of the sum of sixty thousand pounds, ten thousand of which he bequeathed to his widow, Anne Markham, with the residue to his only daughter, Helena Markham, who was to receive it when she came of age, or when she married. Mrs. Markham was appointed sole executrix and guardian of Helena, and was to receive the interest of the money during the girl's minority until she married, when it was to pass to Helena absolutely.

Yes, what the girl had stated was true. She was heiress to the sum of fifty thousand pounds; and supposing he, Chisholm, married her it would be in her power to give him the amount he required for paying his debts.

The young man drew a long breath, and leaned thoughtfully against the table, while he took a mental retrospect of his position. It was not a pleasant idea to marry a girl for her money, but in this case the lady herself had proposed, and surely it was not acting uncharitably to take her at her word?

Chisholm did not care about marrying—he had seen dozens of women to whom he had whispered tender words and honeyed compliments, but only one had ever touched his heart, and that one had refused him. Man of the world as he was, he still had dreams of something brighter and better than these society flirtations—of some future time when he would realise the existence of that love whose sweetness poets have sung, and artists have limned.

All these visions had been dashed to the ground since his recklessness had plunged him

into difficulties from which he could see no possible outlet until this chance of salvation came. He would accept it—he *must* accept it, or bear for ever the band of dishonour bitterer than death itself!

He started up, and left Somerset House, paid a visit to his lawyers, dropped into his club and had something to drink—eat he could not while his excitement was so great—and then dawdled his time away as best he could until a quarter to five, when he started for Hyde Park.

Helena was punctual. Exactly as the clock struck she appeared, walking quickly, but with no appearance of hurry, and veiled as she had been in the morning.

"Well," he said, as a greeting, "I have decided to accept your offer, supposing you are still of the same mind."

She bowed her head.

"We can be married as soon as you like, for, directly you appoint the time I will procure a special licence," he continued, feeling less at ease than he had ever done before. "There will have to be some formalities to be gone through, but that will not affect the legality of the ceremony. I suppose you wish settlements to be made?"

"I wish to have the whole of my fortune settled upon myself," she said, distinctly, "with the exception of fifteen thousand pounds which I shall give to you absolutely, and you, at the same time, must undertake never to molest me in any shape or form."

"I understand, and I quite agree. We will go to a lawyer's at once. Do you know of one, or will you come to mine?"

She took a piece of paper from her pocket.

"This is the address of a solicitor I once heard my father say was an honest man; his name is Frewin, and he lives in Chancery Lane. I have never seen him, but as I know he is to be trusted, we had better go to him."

Chisholm assented, and they went into Oxford Street and called a hansom, in which they were driven to Chancery Lane. Neither spoke a word during the journey. The young officer sat upright, with thoughtful eyes and gloomy expression; and the girl leaned back against the cushions, her fingers never ceasing their restless movements.

Mr. Frewin was a middle-aged man of gentlemanly appearance and pleasant manner; but, although his professional experience had introduced him to many strange things, he told himself he had never heard of so strange a marriage settlement as the one this unknown client requested him to draw up.

Two days later Helena Markham and Vane Chisholm stood at the altar of a dingy London church, through whose smoke-grimed windows the May sunlight streamed in a dusty yellow radiance. A young curate, the clerk, and an old woman in a poke bonnet and goloshes, formed the rest of the group; and, it must be confessed that each of the three latter looked a little bewildered, as if they hardly understood the ceremony at which they were assisting.

Chisholm was like a man in a dream, and it was only by the strongest effort of will that he managed to follow the sense of the words the curate was repeating. So little did he know what was expected of him that he actually started when the clergyman placed Helena's hand in his, and told him to repeat the formula.

"I, Vane, take thee, Helena, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part!"

What a mockery it was—those solemn words, when each was marrying the other purely as a matter of convenience, and nothing else! He felt it even more strongly than she did; for, animated as she was by the one strong purpose in which this ceremony culminated, she had no thought to spare for anything else. Nevertheless, after she had signed her name in the register—her maiden name for the last time—and the old woman in the

goloshes came up, dropping a low curtsy, and saying:

"I wish you luck, Mrs. Chisholm!" she started violently, realising for the first time what she had done.

At this moment there was a scuffle at the other end of the church—the sound of footsteps, and a woman's voice raised in angry remonstrance as its owner came rapidly up the aisle. Helena drew a little nearer Vane.

"It is my stepmother!" she whispered, and he, feeling it was now his duty to protect her, pulled her arm through his.

Mrs. Markham was a woman of middle age, with a hard, thin, aquiline face and pale blue eyes—eyes that might have belonged to Medusa, so cold and stony was their expression—a woman who had been—nay, was still—handsome, but a woman whose inflexible will one might indeed despair of ever bending!

She stood still for a moment and contemplated the newly-wedded pair, then she said to Helena:

"I have traced you and followed you from the Carlton Hotel, and I desire that you will at once return with me to S—shire."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," the girl responded, in a curiously triumphant voice, though her tones were hardly above a whisper. "I am now in a position to defy your authority, for I am the wife of Captain Vane Chisholm, and to him I refer you."

Mrs. Markham did not lose her self-possession, although her face grew very grey, and a look came in her eyes that reminded Vane of a wild animal cheated of its prey. She addressed herself to him:

"I do not know who you are, sir; but if you have been foolish enough to go through any ceremony of marriage with this headstrong girl it must be immediately dissolved. Are you aware she is under age?"

"I am!"

"Then your marriage is not legal."

"Pardon me, madam, there you are in error. It is true that by declaring the lady to be over twenty-one I have laid myself open to a criminal prosecution, but that does not affect the legality of my marriage in the slightest degree. Your step-daughter is my wife, and not all the law-courts in England could dissolve our union."

He spoke very quietly, but with an air of assurance that was entirely convincing, and the baffled woman felt that his words were true. To prosecute him would avail her little if Helena's fortune were permitted to dip out of her grasp.

She was wise in her generation, and was aware that the less she said the better until she knew precisely the position in which she was placed. Controlling herself as best she could, she turned to the clergyman, who had been an amazed spectator of this scene.

"Is what this man says true?" she demanded, imperiously.

"Quite true, in so far that he and the lady are legally married."

"What is his name?"

The clergyman gave it, and then Mrs. Markham, with a glance of malevolent hatred at Helena, turned away, with the intention of consulting a lawyer as to what steps she had better take in the matter.

Chisholm paid the fees, obtained the certificate—of which Helena took possession—and escorted his wife to the church door, where she made a pause.

"Good-bye!" she said, holding out her hand.

He hesitated in some embarrassment.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"With that you have nothing to do," was the calm reply. "Remember the terms of our compact—henceforth we are strangers; any future communications relative to the money due to you must be made through Mr. Frewin."

"Yes. But I thought that perhaps I might save you from being annoyed by your step-mother."

"I can do that myself equally well, for now

that I am married her power over me ceases. Nevertheless, I thank you for your kind intention. Once more, good-bye!"

They shook hands. She entered a hansom, and gave the driver directions in a tone too low to be overheard; then, as she drove off, turned to look once at the man standing on the steps of the church door—a motionless figure, apparently lost in meditation.

Thus husband and wife parted, each hoping they might never see the other again!

CHAPTER III.

It is seven years later when we meet Helena again, and those seven years, although uneventful, in a way, have not passed without bringing changes. Perhaps it will be well to take a short retrospect of them, in order the better to understand the exact position of our heroine; for, in spite of the mad act into which her impetuosity hurried her, she is still our heroine.

On parting with her husband she had gone straight to the solicitor, Mr. Frewin, and, after an interview with him, had declared her intention of immediately proceeding to Brussels and placing herself in a school there, so as to perfect her education and thoroughly acquire the French language.

This design she put into execution, and at the school she remained for two years, during which time she never saw her stepmother, who had been advised of the uselessness of trying to upset the marriage, and had so far resigned herself to circumstances as to content herself with her own share of Mr. Markham's money, and take to herself a second husband; while her son, who for various reasons did not care to remain in England, began a fresh career in Australia.

On leaving school, Helena travelled on the continent with a lady, who had advertised in the *Times* for a travelling companion, and who proved to be a charming woman of middle-age named Travers.

After this tour they decided to take a house together, and accordingly did so in a country village about fifty miles from London, where they led a quiet, retired life, seeing very few people, and depending for amusement chiefly on the boxes of books that arrived periodically from Mudie's.

This was all very well for Mrs. Travers, a woman who had passed her fortieth year, and to whom content was represented by quiet; but Helena, with the young blood of early womanhood coursing through her veins, found, after a time, that it hardly satisfied her. She grew restless, longing for something to do, for new works, new sensations; anything, in fact, that was different to this stagnation.

All this while no communication whatever had passed between her and her husband, and but for that plain gold orlet on the third finger of her left hand, she might have fancied the episode of her marriage had taken place merely in imagination.

As the years went by, the remembrance of it grew bitter and bitter—brought a hotter flood of shame to her cheeks, and made her clench her hands together in an access of distressful remorse, whose agony no one save herself could possibly estimate.

She had asked a man to marry her, and that man a stranger! No matter that the necessity had been strong, no matter that she herself was little more than a child, driven well-nigh mad by her stepmother's persecution—the fact remained that she had outraged all instincts of womanly modesty. She had forgotten the barriers by which maidenhood is surrounded, and, in doing so, had rendered herself the victim of an eternal shame.

Sometimes she heard of Vane Chisholm—Colonel Chisholm he was now—and, although the mere mention of his name brought red hot blushes to her cheek, she followed his career with an unflinching interest.

Whatever he might have been in the past, it was certain that now he devoted himself to his profession with even more than ordinary zest, for every action in which he had been

engaged he had distinguished himself, and his name was in men's mouths as a synonym for a valour that never faltered, a bold courage amounting, in some instances, almost to fool-hardiness.

Mrs. Travers, although she did not know the full details of Helena's marriage, was aware that she was the wife of Colonel Chisholm, and that they had parted on their wedding day. It seemed to her curious, but she had perfect confidence in her young companion, and supposed there must be good reasons for this extraordinary separation of husband and wife.

She was very fond of Helena, and had watched her growing discontent with some anxiety. It cannot be said she was much startled when the girl one day announced her intention of going out to the East as a nurse.

"I want something to do," she said, with a slightly nervous laugh, as she turned from the window near which she had been standing, "and I fancy I have a sort of vocation for nursing. It seems to me I lead a very selfish, useless kind of life here, with nothing to think of save my own pleasures, and if I could be of any use to those poor wounded soldiers it would be, to say the least, a satisfaction. What do you think of my plan?"

"For my own sake, I am sorry, of course," returned Mrs. Travers, slowly; "but, as regards yourself, I certainly think you will be happier if you have something to do. Still, you are young to go to the East alone!"

"I am not so very young, forty-and-twenty; and besides," with a hard laugh, "you forget I am a married woman. Of course," she added, quickly, "I shall go with a band of properly organised nurses, and so shall have protection. I think I will write about it at once."

Helena was still as impetuous as she had been of yore, even though, physically, she had altered almost beyond recognition. She had grown taller, her figure had developed from the ungraceful angles of girlhood into the beautifully rounded outlines of a maturer age, and her whole presence had undergone a change which had transformed her from a pale, thin-cheeked girl into a splendidly handsome woman.

After her last remark Mrs. Travers did not speak for some time; then she said, rather suddenly:

"Have you seen anything in the papers lately concerning Colonel Chisholm?"

Helena shook her head.

"No; his name has not been mentioned for months—not since I read that he had been ordered home on sick leave. I expect he is in England at the present time!"

Mrs. Travers wondered if that was the reason his wife wished to leave England; but she discreetly said nothing, and Helena sat down to the writing-table, and scribbled off some letters, making inquiries concerning the contingent of nurses who were then on the point of starting for South Africa.

In a day or two she received an answer, and a week later she had started, and was well on her way to the East, rejoicing in the prospect of the change which this new life offered.

Change, indeed, it was, but the work was very hard as well, and, if she had not been thoroughly strong and healthy, she would have been unable to continue. As it was, although she never had a moment unemployed, and there were times when her very soul sickened at the awful sights which the horrors of war rendered inevitable, she by no means regretted the step she had taken, for her services were invaluable, and doctors and patients were never tired of singing her praises.

One day, after a particularly hard morning's work, she sat down in her bedroom, thinking to get a few minutes' rest, when there came a hasty knock at the door, and, on opening it, she found the doctor outside.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Sister Monica," he said—for this was the name by which she

was known—"but a bad case has just been brought in, and all the other nurses are engaged. Can you attend to it?"

"Certainly," she responded, with alacrity, as she took up a clean apron and began tying it on; "who is it?"

"An officer—one of the bravest and most distinguished in the service, Lord Saagrove!"

She had heard the name before—or read of it in newspapers, where it was always mentioned in terms of respect, but who its owner was, whether old or young, she had no idea.

Without further questions she followed Doctor Weston into the ward, and there she saw a man lying on the bed, of about one-and-thirty, but who, white and drawn as his face was with pain, looked considerably older. His eyes were shut, and every now and then a slight sound broke from his firmly-closed lips, as if the pain he endured was too hard even for his fortitude to repress.

He was severely wounded in the leg—so severely that the limb would probably have to be amputated. Helena had no time to study his appearance, for the doctor immediately showed her the wound, gave her instructions as to dressing it, and then, telling her to remain by the patient until his return, hurried off to visit his other charges.

By this time Helena had got over the first repulsion cases such as these gave her, and now her only thought was to do her utmost to assuage the wounded man's pain. She dressed the wound, pulled the sheets straight, and then gently smoothed the pillow, so as to make his head more comfortable.

As she performed this last office, Lord Saagrove opened his eyes and looked up at her, and the girl started back with a little, half-smothered exclamation, for directly she saw those full, deep-blue eyes, remembrance came to her, and she recognised the sick man as her husband!

Yes, changed and aged, bronzed by exposure to tropical suns, weather-beaten as he was, he was yet the same man to whom she had pledged her troth, seven years ago, in the dingy little London church—the man who had accepted fifteen thousand pounds of her fortune, and who had then gone away to India, and had never since set eyes on his native land!

The recognition came upon her with a shock of surprise; but it was not mutual, for his eyes—albeit a gleam or admiration came in them—looked up into hers with the vacant gaze of a perfect stranger. It was not unnatural, for it must be remembered that he had only seen her face once, and then it was the face of a girl of seventeen, whereas now seven years had wrought their work, and given her a beauty that her early girlhood lacked.

"Who are you?" he asked, even yet hardly conscious.

There was a pause before her reply came, but in giving it her voice was perfectly firm.

"I am Nurse Monica, and it is my duty to attend you. Is there anything you would like?"

"I should like some water, please."

She gave it to him, then sat down by his side and took up her knitting, for he, had again closed his eyes, and sunk into the semi-lethargic state in which she had first found him. As the knitting progressed mechanically beneath her busy fingers, her brain was equally busy with the thought of the strange situation in which, by some caprice of Fate, she had been placed.

Should she continue to wait upon her husband, secure in the belief that he would not recognise her, or should she go away and leave her work—go back to Woodlands and Mrs. Travers, and the quiet country life from which she had been so glad to escape?

It was a difficult question to solve, for nurses were scarce, and she was quite well aware that if she left it would not be easy to fill her place—indeed, such an act on her part would be met with remonstrance and indignation from all the staff.

He would not recognise her—of that she felt sure, for she knew how greatly she had altered; and, besides, even if it had not been so, it was a question whether, having seen her face but once, he would, after this lapse of time, remember it.

Helena sat there for some time, debating her position; then she rose, and with an air of irresolution quite foreign to her usual manner, took up a stick, and held it upright. She would let chance decide for her. If the stick fell to her right hand, then she would stay; if to her left, then she would go.

The colour changed in her cheeks as she stood holding the stick in her hand. With a slight tightening of the lips she let it fall, and it fell to the right.

So she stayed.

CHAPTER IV.

Then followed a time of watching and anxiety—of doubt on the doctor's part, and fear on the nurse's; for Lord Seagrave—as Vane Chisholm was now called—lay hovering between life and death, and the merest trifle would have sufficed to turn the balance against him.

But it was not fated to be. He was still young, and his constitution, hardened as it had been by constant outdoor exercises, was like steel in its powers of endurance; so that after a time, during which he had been delirious, and raved incessantly of home, of his wasted youth, of a woman he called Christabel, and of some secret sorrow whose nature he never divulged, he awoke in his proper senses, weak as a child, but snatched from the jaws of death.

"Well," said the doctor, cheerily, as he came his rounds, and saw Lord Seagrave for the first time after reason had come back, "How are you feeling now?"

"Not over and above bright," the officer answered, with a wan smile; "but I suppose I must not complain, seeing that the only wonder is I am alive at all."

"You have great cause for thankfulness," observed Dr. Weston, gravely, "for I never saw a man so near death. You owe your life to Heaven's mercy, and under it to the care of Nurse Monica, whose devotion has been something wonderful."

"Has she been with me all the time?" asked the sick man.

"All the time—night and day. I really don't know how she has managed to do without sleep herself; but then she has never once thought of herself in her anxiety on your behalf. There are very few such creatures in the world. Wordworth must have had such an one in his mind when he spoke of:—

"A perfect woman—nobly planned."

As the doctor left him Helena came in, gave the patient his medicine, and then proceeded to put away the empty bottles, and restore the narrow ward to something like order. His eyes watched her all the time—a gracious presence, looking sweeter in her black dress, with white cap and apron, than any of the Court beauties his eyes had once loved to rest upon. Presently she came and seated herself at his side, and then he spoke.

"Nurse!"

"Yes," she said, regarding him steadily as she took up her knitting.

"I owe you a debt of gratitude," he began. "Dr. Weston has been telling me I owe my life to your care, and I wish to thank you for it."

"I did my duty," she returned, calmly, "nothing more."

"You mean you would have done the same for anyone else as you have done for me?"

"Certainly."

"But then," she said, dimly recognising some veiled antagonism in her manner, "you would have allowed that 'somebody else' to thank you."

"As I told you before I have only done my duty, and have, therefore, no claim on your gratitude. I have nursed you, it is true, but

then I came to Africa for the purpose of nursing wounded soldiers."

If she had been asked she could hardly have explained the frame of mind which prompted her to treat him with a coldness that she certainly would not have shown to other patients.

All through his illness she had devoted herself to him with a self-sacrificing care that had deserved—and won—the highest praise from the staff. She had denied herself rest in order never to be absent from his side. She had moistened his parched lips, bathed his hot brow when the fever of delirium was upon him, and told herself, as she looked on the pale, clear-cut features, that her first instinct had, after all, been a correct one; and he was a man whom any woman could trust.

Then had come his feverish ravings, his exclamations of remorse for some act in the past which he seemed to remember with bitterest repentance and pain—an act whose nature Helena had no difficulty in guessing. A hot flood of shame had mounted to her brow as she heard him, and she told herself bitterly that she had ruined his life, in addition to spoiling her own, by that unmaidenly act of folly which could never be undone. Something of bitterness that was not jealousy, and yet partook of the nature of jealousy, surged up within her heart when she heard the sick man call out for—

"Christabel! Christabel!"

Who was Christabel? A woman whom he had loved, but whom the cruellest fate prevented his marrying—a woman who, but for that ceremony of seven years ago, might, ere this, have become his wife and given him a happiness which now could never be his?

Sensitive people are apt to create troubles where they do not exist, and to exaggerate anything that tends to make them blame themselves. Helena was no exception to this rule, and it is impossible to over-estimate the agony of wounded pride she suffered while listening to poor Vane's unconscious ravings.

He was puzzled at her demeanour; heretofore he had been accustomed to think himself a favourite with women, and to believe that the sex had treated him with more kindness than was bestowed on the generality of men; but certainly this Nurse Monica received his thanks very ungraciously, and although she performed her duties with a scrupulous exactitude that left no room for complaint, there was a subtle change in her manner which he was quick to perceive.

Convalescence was a slow and tedious process, and Vane, who had never had a day's illness in his life, chafed and fretted sorely at this forced inaction. His sole interest consisted in watching his nurse, who proved a study that he was never weary of speculating over.

"Who was she—what was she?" he asked himself, and once he addressed this question to the doctor, who promptly replied—

"She is Nurse Monica. I know nothing more concerning her!"

This had to content him, but it rather stimulated than satisfied his curiosity. It so happened at this time that Helena had more leisure than usual to devote to him; and once, when he was more than ordinarily tired of lying still doing nothing, she offered to read to him. He accepted the proposal with alacrity.

"Would you mind reading Shakespeare?" he asked. "I have a little pocket edition which always travels with me."

He told her where to find it—a small, morocco bound volume, bearing upon its pages the imprint of constant use. Vane did not pretend to be a student, but he loved Shakespeare as one loves the man who, knowing all human frailty, has given us the loveliest accounts of human love, and truth, and constancy the world has ever read.

"Romeo and Juliet" was the play selected, and, listening to it, Vane forgot his pain and weariness, his homesickness and helplessness, and followed the fortunes of those two pas-

sionate lovers as eagerly as if he were a love-sick boy himself.

Helena read delightfully. She had a sweet, full voice; and, moreover, her perfect appreciation of the poem made her give each word its proper emphasis, and infused a wonderful tremor of tenderness in her tone as she repeated Juliet's sweet, loving speeches.

"Isn't it a pity the English language is so limited in its expressions of gratitude?" Vane said, as she laid down the book. "I say 'thank you' when you give me my physic, and I can only say the same now you have given me the very greatest treat it is possible for me to enjoy!"

He half raised himself on his elbow, and looked into her eyes as she spoke—his own eager and earnest—with a feeling that was almost emotion. Involuntarily the girl's own eyes softened, and a little expression of tremulous pleasure played about her lips.

"I am glad you liked it!" she said, softly, wondering if, while listening to Romeo's vows of love, his thoughts had travelled away to the fair woman upon whom he had called in his delirium.

"It was the last play I went to see before leaving England," the soldier went on, in a meditative voice, "but I did not enjoy it then as much as I do now. Shall I tell you one of the reasons why?"

"If you like."

"Well, then, I was up to my ears in debt—I thought I should have to sell out of my regiment, and I knew if that catastrophe occurred I was already a good way down that sliding which leads to—the bad!"

"But you did not sell out?" said Helena, her heart beginning to beat very rapidly.

"No. A stroke of luck befell me—at least, I was inclined to look upon it as a stroke of luck at the time, though I am far from being of that opinion now, for I know it was the surrender of a liberty that would have been worth twenty times the price I paid for it!"

He drew a deep sigh, and remained for a few minutes thoughtfully silent; then he resumed, in a lighter tone:

"If you are at all interested in my career, you may be glad to know I settled all my debts before I went to India, and have been very careful to steer clear of them since."

"It must be doubly awkward to be encumbered with a title when you are in debt," she observed, in a voice that was not quite steady.

"I should imagine you are right, but such was never my experience. I only succeeded to the title five months ago."

"Indeed!"

"And then it was most unexpectedly. My uncle, the last Lord Seagrave, had two sons, each of whose lives was as good, if not better, than my own, for they were some years younger, and had excellent constitutions. They were away in America together, and one day came the news that while they were out fishing a storm had come on, their boat had been capsize, and the two young men been drowned. Hard lines for them, poor fellows! I was heartily sorry, for we had been great chums once upon a time, and, Heavens knows, I never grudged them their prospects! The news was too much for my poor old uncle, who had a stroke of paralysis, and died within a week. I am the last of my line, and with me the title will die, for I shall never marry!"

"Why not?" asked Helena, prompted to put the question by an insatiable desire to know what his answer would be.

"Because there is a reason which will prevent it."

"But you would like to marry?" she persisted.

"Yes. I suppose no man cares to think that he will go down to his grave without forming those ties that help to sweeten life, and it will certainly be a grief to me to think I am the last representative of my family. At my death the title will become extinct, for

I have no male relatives nearly enough akin to inherit it."

He said no more, for the turn the conversation had taken seemed to trouble him, and for some time after speaking he lay with closed eyes and knitted brows, apparently thinking out some problem to which it was difficult to find a solution.

Helena decided that his thoughts had gone back to his rash marriage.

CHAPTER V.

Another skirmish took place, and although it was entirely successful for the Imperial Forces a dozen soldiers and two or three officers were wounded, and had to be taken to the hospital.

Among the latter was Colonel Molyneux, Vane's former "chum" and faithful friend. Fortunately he had sustained no serious injury, although his wound was just severe enough to prevent his going into action immediately, and consequently he and Lord Seagrave—who by this time was pretty well convalescent—were very often together, and Helena found her attendance less needed than it had formerly been.

Not that Vane liked to be away, for he made no effort to conceal the pleasure he felt in her society; but the girl herself, obeying some impulse which was stronger than reason, thought it better to absent herself as much as possible.

When—as was not often the case—she was alone, and had leisure to think, she confessed to herself that so far from being unpleasant, her tending of her husband had given her a keen joy which every hour spent with him served to augment. She grew to know him well, became acquainted with his tastes, learned to know his favourite books and poems, and pursuits, and in hearing him recount passages and anecdotes of his past life, grew to fancy she had known him intimately for many years.

At first she was inclined to resent Colonel Molyneux's intrusion as a grievance, for it was not pleasant to find she was less needed than formerly, but she chid herself pretty severely for this selfishness, and—as she fancied—overcame it.

One day she was sitting behind the screen that divided Lord Seagrave's ward from the next one, when she heard him talking to his friend. No idea of leaving crossed her mind, for she knew Vane was aware that conversation could be overheard from one ward to the other, and it did not strike her that he might, in the excitement of talking, forget such was the case, and say something he would not care to have listened to by other ears than those he addressed.

Molyneux seemed to be remonstrating with him, but he spoke in a low tone, so that his words were undistinguishable, while Vane's answer was distinctly audible.

"I know that what you say is right!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "I know I am a fool, if not something worse, but even you must confess what fearfully hard lines it is for me. I tell you I love her better than my own life, and if it were not for that cursed marriage of seven years ago I should have a chance of happiness that can now never be mine!"

"It is hard lines," assented Molyneux, gravely; "but it would be still harder if you were to forget that you are bound, and make her life miserable as well as your own."

"You don't know what it is," Molyneux. You have never been in love as I am now. Why, I tell you she fills my thoughts, sleeping and waking!"

"I believe it; she is beautiful enough in all conscience to set any man's heart aflame. But, Vane, where love and honour point two different ways, there should be no hesitation as to which you should take."

"I know," was the restlessly impatient answer; "but these theories of yours strike me in much the same light as would advice to a man who was dying of thirst, and who you tried to persuade not to drink out of the cup

offered to him. You see my case is so hopeless—nothing can set me free."

"Except your wife's death."

Helena with difficulty restrained a little cry of pain, and rising from her seat went to her tiny bedroom, and there went over again all she had heard. She had known that Vane was in love; for once, when she was reading "Shakespeare" to him, she had seen on the fly-leaf the words:

"Vane, from Christabel"—and had asked him who "Christabel" was? His face had reddened as he replied briefly:—"She is my cousin."

And then he abruptly changed the subject, and she fancied he had resented her inquiry as an impertinent intrusion on his secrets.

She tried to look at the situation quite impartially—just as if she had been someone else to whom the story had been told, and she confessed that Vane's position was, indeed, a hard one. Acting on an impulse, tempted as he had been by the hope of paying his debts, he had let one act ruin the whole of his future life, and the worst of it was, the act could not be recalled. Wild ideas of a divorce flashed through Helena's mind, but she dismissed them all as impossible of fulfilment.

To her honour be it said that she thought far less of herself than of him—that she blamed her own act, and condoned his folly, telling herself that the sacrifice, so far as she was concerned, was infinitely less than that he was called upon to endure.

And nothing could set him free save her death!

She shivered a little, as if she were cold, when the remembrance of Molyneux's words came back to her. Thank Heaven, he, and not Vane, had spoken them!

As Helena sat there, communing with her own heart, one thing made itself quite clear—namely, that she must go away, and not run the risk of possible detection. True, it was no nearer now than it had been all along; but her fears were greater, and consequently she exaggerated the danger of discovery.

A sharp pang went through her as she thought of saying good-bye to him for ever, and the coming years seemed to her greyer and colder in their promise than they had ever done before. What was the reason of this? Had he, indeed, become so much a part of her life that she could not bear to think of it without him?

All in a moment a hot flame of blushes mounted to her cheeks, and she sat down on the side of her little straight bed trembling in every limb; for, like an inspiration, the truth had come to her, and she knew she loved him!

Yes, with the first passion that had ever come to her—with the full, deep devotion of a noble heart, which has never frittered away its affection in a dozen different channels, but pours forth the wealth of its riches in one boundless stream, asking—hoping for no return.

Poor Helena! She attempted no disguise even to herself. Her secret once confessed, and she understood the strangely contradictory feelings with which she had approached Lord Seagrave, and the reason why he had occupied so much of her thoughts. What a fool she had been not to leave directly she knew he was there!

But it was of no use regretting the past; her next action must be to repair it. And this she decided could only be done by an instant departure from Africa. Vane was now out of danger, so she need have no hesitation in leaving him; and as there were, at the present moment, so few patients in the hospital, she did not think she would have any difficulty in getting away.

As usual, she determined to strike while the iron was hot, and accordingly she sought the doctor, and asked him if she could be spared, alleging as her reason for desiring to get back to England the fact of a friend's illness—which was not altogether a fiction, see-

ing that she had that day received a letter from Mrs. Travers, who complained of being very unwell, and wanting her young companion back.

Permission to leave was readily granted, although the doctor expressed his regret at the prospect of losing her, and told her that nursing was certainly her vocation, and he hoped she would not give it up.

She made some vague reply, for, in good truth, she had formed no plans for the future. Indeed, her mind was almost a complete blank, out of whose chaos only two images presented themselves with any distinctness—the fact that she loved Vane Chisholm and that he longed for her death in order that he might marry another woman!

CHAPTER VI.

Helena could not trust herself to say farewell to Vane, so early next morning she started on her way home, not without some misgivings as to travelling alone in a country alive with the horrors of war. She was more fortunate that she could have hoped, however, and after some little delay in securing a passage, found herself at Cape Town, en route for England.

The excitement of the journey was a good thing for her in her present state of mind, and prevented her from brooding too deeply over her troubles. As a matter of fact, she tried her best to dismiss the thought of Lord Seagrave from her mind, but memory was too strong for her, and brought his image before her every hour of the day.

On reaching London she sent a telegram to Mrs. Travers, who was, of course, unaware of her intended arrival; and that same day she found herself at Woodlands—the name of the house they had taken together.

Something in the appearance of the house, as she drove up the approach, struck her as being strange and unlike itself. When she was at home she always had the windows thrown open and flowers in pots blossoming on the sills, but now all the blinds were down, the plants had withered for want of attention, and Mrs. Travers herself, when she came to the door to meet her, looked pale and woe-begone, while her dress, which was usually the very picture of neatness, had a curiously disordered air, as if its wearer's mind had been too preoccupied to give it any attention.

"Oh, Helena!" she cried, clasping her in her arms as she alighted, "I am so glad you are come. I really don't know what I should have done if you had stayed away any longer!"

She burst into a passion of tears, and Helena, very much puzzled as to the meaning of her agitation, did her best to soothe her, and led her into the drawing-room, where tea was laid on a small wicker table in front of the fire.

"Now tell me what is the matter?" she said, after they had seated themselves.

"Have some tea first, and then you will be better able to bear it," moaned Mrs. Travers, who, like a good many others of her sex, had a firm belief in the virtues of tea.

The girl saw it would be best to humour her, so she poured out a cup, sipped it, and then repeated her question.

"Prepare yourself for the worst, my poor child!" was the startling reply, "for you cannot possibly imagine anything more awful than the catastrophe that has befallen us. We have both lost every halfpenny we possess!"

"What!" exclaimed Helena.

"It is true. The news came yesterday morning. The W.—Bank has failed, the junior partner had been speculating, and his speculations all ended badly. He was found lying dead in his room, and it is believed he poisoned himself to escape exposure and punishment."

"Directly I heard of it I hurried off to W.—, and saw Mr. Sanderson, the lawyer, and he told me he believed our case to be quite hopeless, for the bank would probably pay

a dividend of only sixpence or a shilling in the pound."

The intelligence fell on Helena with unexpected force, for she had always imagined her fortune to be perfectly secure, and would as soon have doubted the stability of the Bank of England as the W— Bank. Still, she did not lose her presence of mind, or cry out as loudly against Fate as did her companion.

To the young the loss of money is never so terrible as it is to the old, and our heroine was not only young and strong, but possessed a confidence in herself that Mrs. Travers lacked.

"After all," she said, "things may not be so bad as you imagine. Of course, everything is in confusion just now, and the worst is made of it. Perhaps some remnant of our money may be saved."

Mrs. Travers shook her head despondingly.

"I am afraid not. It would not be so bad if only half our money was invested there; but the W— Bank gave such a good rate of interest, and was supposed to be so perfectly safe, that I actually sold everything I had out of the Three per Cent, in order to increase my income, and persuaded you to do the same. If it were only my own money I should not mind so much, but it is yours as well, and it is through me you have lost it."

Her self-reproach was very bitter, and she was so absorbed in this new trouble that she took very little interest in Helena's African experiences, and asked her few questions concerning them.

On consideration, the girl determined to tell her nothing of her meeting with Vane, as it would only have provoked comment, which it would have been painful for her to hear, and could have done no good, so Mrs. Travers remained in ignorance of the fact that husband and wife had seen each other again.

The next few weeks were taken up with visits to the lawyer and to the bank, but by the end of that time it was quite clear that very little would be saved from the wreck of their investments, and it became necessary for the two women to resolve on their future plan of action.

Of course, they could not afford to live on at Woodlands; but, fortunately, their lease was just out, so there would be no difficulty in giving up the house.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Travers, one evening when they were discussing ways and means, "I suppose you would not care to apply to your husband?"

Helena made a hasty movement of negation.

"You see, he had a good slice of your fortune, and so it is clearly his duty to help you now that you require help," pursued the speaker, who would dearly have liked to see a reconciliation between husband and wife.

"If I were starving I would not apply to him!" declared the girl, firmly. "The money he had from me was a free gift; or, rather, given for a certain consideration, and as he discharged his part of the bargain, I have not the shadow of a claim upon him."

"Then," said Mrs. Travers, "will you come to America with me—at least, for a time? My brother has many times asked me to go over and live with him, but I have always refused, because I thought it might not be agreeable to his wife. Now that she is dead I shall accept his offer."

"It is by far the best thing you can do. As he is a widower, and has no children, you cannot be otherwise than welcome."

"As you would be, dear Helena."

"It is very good of you to say so, but the cases are widely different, and I very much doubt whether I should be happy if I ever depended on the bounty of anyone—let alone a stranger. No, I must earn my living as best I can."

"But what shall you do?"

"Become a professional nurse, perhaps. I think the life would suit me, and I am sure I should like it."

"But it would be such hard work!"

"Beggars must not be choosers, and I shall

have to do the work that I am best fitted for."

Mrs. Travers pondered some time, and then returned to the charge of trying to persuade Helena to take up her abode at her brother's house in New York. To this, however, the girl would not consent, but, as a compromise, she promised to go over to America with Mrs. Travers and stay there for six months—a plan which she mentally decided would be a good one, for it would provide her with the change and excitement that she felt were a necessity in helping her to forget Vane.

Then followed a busy time of arranging for the sale of the furniture—the proceeds of which provided both ladies with a little ready money; and leaving the house, they took lodgings in London for a week or two before making final arrangements, and bought such things as they were likely to require on the journey, after which they engaged berths in a steamer that was advertised to sail the next week, and felt the satisfaction of knowing that their plans were now complete.

As Helena was returning to their lodgings, after doing some shopping on the day preceding that on which they were to sail, a curious accident befell her, which was destined to have a considerable influence on her future life. She was walking along Oxford Street, when a man stumbled against her and then fell heavily to the ground at her feet.

Bending down to look at his face, to her horror she recognised William Compton, the son of her father's second wife—the man who had tried so hard to make her marry him years ago.

Of course, a crowd immediately collected, and there were various opinions hazarded, amongst them being the suggestion that the man must be drunk. But this was not the case, as Helena speedily ascertained; he was really and truly ill, and she fancied from the pinched look of his features that hunger had something to do with his prostrate condition.

All feelings of animosity that she might formerly have cherished faded from the girl's mind, and she thought of nothing but the fact of a fellow-creature lying before her in dire poverty and distress—a man who, moreover, might claim some distant connection with herself.

Without waiting to reflect, she called a cab, and directed a policeman who was near to help the prostrate man inside; then she sent to the nearest public-house for some brandy, which she administered, the result being that Compton opened his eyes and looked at her.

"Don't you know me, William?" she said, gently.

He shook his head. He had not seen her since her marriage, and the alteration that had taken place in her appearance completely prevented him from recognising her.

"I am Helena—once Helena Markham!" she went on, after a moment's pause. "How is it I find you in such a sad state?"

He laughed harshly.

"Poverty!—a thing of which you know nothing. Why, I haven't a penny to bless myself with, let alone to pay a doctor!"

"Have you been ill long?"

"Longer than I shall be ill in future. My time's nearly up."

He was interrupted by a fit of coughing, which left him too weak to talk, and Helena was shocked at his complete exhaustion.

"Where do you live?" she asked presently.

"Nowhere! My landlady turned me out yesterday because I couldn't pay my rent, and I've been wandering about the streets ever since. I suppose I might have got in a hospital or the workhouse, but I'd as soon die as go in either."

"And where is your mother?"

"In Australia! But I don't know anything of her—whether she is alive or dead."

He sank back against the cushions and seemed to fall into a semi-lethargic state, from which it would have been difficult to rouse

him. Only one alternative occurred to Helena, which was to drive him to her lodgings, and there she adopted.

Mrs. Travers was naturally very much surprised at the arrival; but she was a kind-hearted woman, and at once, on hearing the details, approved of what Helena had done.

"Of course you could not have left him to die," she said; and then, more blankly, "but what of our journey to-morrow?"

"I cannot go, that is quite clear," returned the young girl; "but you must not be allowed to forfeit the passage money, and so you must make the journey alone. I will follow by another steamer directly William is well enough to be left."

Mrs. Travers did not like this arrangement at all; but, after all, she could not afford to lose her passage money, neither was she heartless enough to try and persuade Helena to leave the sick man to his fate; so the next day she bade her a tearful good-bye and went to Liverpool, where she embarked in the *Gloriana*.

CHAPTER VII.

William Compton's recovery, under Helena's care and attention, was very rapid, for the bad state into which he had fallen was due as much to neglect as anything else, and her nursing, even more than the doctor's prescriptions, soon made him convalescent.

Strange to say, he showed very little gratitude to the girl, accepting her ministrations as if he had a right to them—as, indeed, he was of opinion that he had. He had never forgiven her refusal of his offers, and even at this length of time felt resentful at the way in which she had escaped him.

When she told him of the failure of the W— Bank, and her own comparative poverty he said,

"If you had married me nothing of the kind would have happened, for I should have looked after your fortune too carefully."

She laughed, quite believing that he would, indeed, have looked after her fortune very carefully; but whether his care would have prevented her losing it was another matter entirely.

She was very kind to him, and not even his ungraciousness made her lose patience; the "cleansing fires" of her unfortunate love had wrought their work, giving to her nature that essence of pure womanly tenderness which, perhaps, it had lacked before, and lending a crowning charm to her beauty, which made it perfectly irresistible.

By this time Compton was so far advanced on his way to recovery as to get up every day after breakfast, and read the paper in order to amuse himself. Helena, although she could ill afford it, got the *Telegraph* every morning, so that he should not feel dull; and, while he scanned its pages she worked away at her knitting, while her thoughts went back to the man whose life was so strangely interwoven with her own.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Compton, one morning while they were respectively thus engaged, and as his companion looked up quickly from her work, he added, "what was the name of the vessel in which your friend sailed?"

"The *Gloriana*—why?"

He did not reply, but gave vent to a low, expressive whistle.

"Is she mentioned there?" continued the girl, starting up in some alarm. "Let me see the paper."

He did not seem inclined to accede to her request; but Helena, fancying from his manner that there must be really something wrong, snatched the newspaper from him, and as her eyes ran swiftly along the headings of the columns, they rested on these words:—

"Terrible Disaster at Sea."

"Loss of the s.s. *Gloriana* with all lives."

"List of the dead."

And then followed a long line of names,

foremost among which were her own and Mrs. Travers!

The news was quite true; the Gloriana had indeed gone down with all hands, and Helena Chisholm—who had booked and paid for her passage, but who had not sailed—was supposed to have perished with the rest of the fated crew.

Naturally she was both shocked and grieved by the idea of her old friend's death, and it gave her the strangest and most eerie sensation to see her own name there as one of the drowned.

Had Vane seen it, she wondered, and what had he said, as he believed himself to be free?

Suddenly, sitting there with the paper on her lap, and the tears that had welled up to her eyes for poor Mrs. Travers, dripping slowly on her white apron, a strange idea came to the girl. Why should she not let people continue to think her dead, and thus give her husband the liberty he craved?

She had no relatives, few friends—no one bound to her by very strong ties, in fact; and so her loss would not cause anyone much grief. She had not even her fortune to hamper her now, and in her efforts to gain her own living it might be even better to start under entirely new conditions.

The more she pondered over the idea the more it commended itself to her; and at last she started up, clenching her hands together, and exclaiming aloud:—

"Yes—I will do it!"

"Do what?" asked William Compton, who had been attentively watching her.

Her face clouded over at the question. She had forgotten his presence, and his very existence as well, and now that she was reminded of it, the consideration came that it would be necessary to take him into her confidence, and bind him over to secrecy.

Well, there was no help for it, and surely it was very little to ask in return for all the kindness she had shown him.

"I am going to ask you a favour," she said, turning to him—pale-faced, but very earnest, "and I want you to promise you will grant it."

"Tell me what it is first. I'm not the sort of fellow to buy a pig in a poke," was the elegant rejoinder.

"Well then, the fact is, I want to begin existence over again. I want to forget this"—holding up her wedding ring—"and call myself a spinster once more."

Compton laughed harshly.

"So that you may get a rich husband, I suppose?"

"No—in order to escape one," she replied, calmly, although her cheek flushed crimson under the insulting suggestion. "I shall continue my nursing, and shall stand a far better chance of getting on well as a single woman than as a married one separated from her husband. The promise I wish you to make is that you will not disclose the fact that I did not sail in the Gloriana."

He reflected a moment.

"So far as that goes I am willing to promise, but does no one else know of it—the landlady of this house, for example?"

"No; she interests herself very little in her lodgers' concerns, and beyond my name being 'Chisholm,' and my rent paid regularly, I doubt whether she knows anything at all about me."

"What should you call yourself?"

"Monica Burn."

Compton seemed surprised at the promptness with which she made the announcement, and she added, in explanation:

"Monica is my second name, and 'Burn' was my mother's maiden name, so there is nothing strange in the conjunction."

"I suppose you'll be wanting to get rid of me soon," observed the young man, after a pause, during which he had revolved various matters in his mind.

"I am afraid my money won't hold out much

longer," Helena responded, in some embarrassment. "Of course I don't wish you to go until you are quite well enough to be alone."

"I see; that means the sooner I take my book the better pleased you'll be. Well, I'll leave the end of this week, though, goodness knows how I shall support myself."

His companion was silent. If she, a girl, could earn her living, surely he ought to be able to do so?

He had very fair abilities, and his knowledge of French and German would stand him in good stead if he tried for a clerkship; indeed, he was qualified to take a very decent situation, only that his dissolute habits prevented his keeping one.

However, towards the end of the week, he went out one afternoon and returned in high spirits, saying he had met a former friend who had had a windfall of luck, and had promised him a berth at thirty shillings a week.

"Thirty bob a week is not much," observed William, disparagingly, "but still it will keep me from the workhouse."

Helena thought it ought to do a great deal more than this, but she prudently refrained from saying so, and the next day he wished her good-bye and went away, giving her an address to which he asked her to write as soon as she was settled.

She breathed a sigh of relief at his departure, for unconsciously she had chafed at his presence as a restraint, and revelled in the sense of feeling herself perfectly free again.

Then she set herself seriously to face the difficulties of her position, for her little store of money had dwindled very low indeed, and it would be still lower when the doctor's bill for attendance on William Compton had been paid.

Strange to say, as she sat there musing, the doctor himself came in.

"Where is your brother?" he asked, looking round the room, for it was in this relationship he had regarded nurse and patient. "I was passing, and so I thought I would look in."

"I am glad you did," she responded. "I was on the point of writing to ask you for your bill, and also to ask if you know of anyone who wants a nurse. I have not had a hospital training, but I think I know the duties of the profession thoroughly."

"I am sure you do!" warmly. "I don't know of a situation likely to suit you just at present, but I will keep my eyes open, and let you know if I succeed in finding anything."

She thanked him, and he kept his promise so well that she received a note from him two days later, asking her to call at No. —, Park Lane, and inquire for Lady Seagrave, who wanted a nurse and companion combined.

Lady Seagrave! Why, that must be the widow of the last peer—the aunt of Vane Chisholm, and mother of Christabel!

Helena's heart began to beat very fast, and her first idea was to refuse to go; but then came an overwhelming desire to see these relatives of her husband, and especially to be brought face to face with the woman he loved. Perhaps, too, unknown to herself, there may have been a lurking wish once more to set eyes on Vane himself, for in these days of her sorrow and loneliness the remembrance of the hours they had passed together haunted her with a constantly increasing pain. She was experiencing the truth of the poet's words:—

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow,
To remember happier things."

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Seagrave was a woman of forty-seven or eight, who had been a beauty in her youth, but now that both youth and beauty had departed felt the time hang heavily on her hands, and had adopted the rôle of 'invalid' in order to fill it.

She was a fanciful person, too, and, luckily for Helena, took a liking to the latter and did not trouble her with many questions on the occasion of her first visit; but finding the

salary she demanded was not large, engaged her immediately to come for a month on trial.

"Your duties will not be heavy," she said, in her low, languid tones, that were a trifle affected. "I keep a maid, but I want someone near me who thoroughly understands illness, and who can also read to me. My daughter is away from home so much that I see very little of her, and, besides, she is so strong and healthy that she has no sympathy with other people's ailments. When shall you be able to come to me?"

"Whenever your ladyship likes."

"The sooner the better. This is Thursday, shall we say Monday?"

Helena bowed, and then took leave, rather doubtful whether she had done a wise thing, but never for one moment thinking of turning back in the path she had chosen. There was in her nature more than a grain of obstinacy, and once having made up her mind to a thing she seldom changed.

On the following Monday, therefore, she took up her abode at No. —, Park Lane, and at once commenced her duties, which were by no means heavy, and only became tiresome when Lady Seagrave was more exacting than usual. Her daughter was away in the country, and did not return to town until Helena had been in her new situation nearly two months. By this time it was the middle of April, and the Honourable Christabel Seagrave had come back in time for the beginning of the London season.

Helena happened to be in the boudoir when she came in to see her mother, and then she was bound to confess that her rival was well worthy any man's admiration. A tall, golden-haired, blue-eyed woman, with a clear pink and white complexion, and the loveliest mouth it is possible to conceive; albeit that some mouth fell into curves that announced its owner's haughty and capricious temper. For about thirty seconds the two girls stood gazing at each other, then Helena quietly left the room, while Christabel turned to her mother and demanded who she was.

"What a heartless creature you are!" exclaimed Lady Seagrave, frostily. "Here you have been away over three months, and instead of asking how I am and saying you are glad to get home again, you begin the moment you enter the house making inquiries about my nurse."

"Your nurse! Oh, well! I must say if I had been choosing a nurse I should have selected a less handsome one. How are you?" as she bent down to kiss the sedate invalid. "You look very well!"

Of course, Lady Seagrave, in common with most other hypochondriacs, deeply resented the imputation of "looking well," and instantly began a recital of all the sufferings she had passed through, and all the additional sufferings with which she was threatened, until Christabel interrupted her.

"Vane came down to Devonshire last week," she said; "he has quite recovered from his illness, and looks himself again. But, all the same, it has changed him a good deal."

"How do you mean?" inquired her mother, with whom the young officer was a great favourite.

"He is a great deal quieter, and more thoughtful. He won't go to race meetings, and utterly refuses to play high at cards! Why, he would not even play for the stakes I did!"

"And a very good thing, too. I wish you would turn over a similar new leaf."

Christabel shrugged her shoulders. She had a fortune of her own, and she was determined to spend it how she liked. As she was considerably more than twenty-one, she had entire control over it, and consequently resented any attempt at interference on her mother's part.

"I suppose it is about time Vane did reform," she went on, presently, "and I expect he'll want to marry before very long, in order to give Seagrave Hall a mistress, and the estates the prospect of an heir!"

Lady Seagrave flashed a keen glance at her.

"Shall you accept him if he offers himself to you again?"

"Yes," promptly. "Of course he is in a different position now to what he was eight years ago, when he and I made love to each other in the Seagrave woods. He really was very fond of me then."

"He was foolishly fond of you, or he never would have been so silly as to ask your father's consent to your marrying him. Of course, it was quite out of the question, as he himself was bound to acknowledge, for he had no income, and an infinitude of debts."

"I never could make out how he paid those debts," observed Christabel, thoughtfully. "I suppose he must have backed some outsider, and won on the Turf, or at cards, for he had no legitimate means of raising money. By-the-way, he lost some friend in the Gloriana, and he would not tell me who. He has put a black band round his arm; but for all that I don't fancy he grieves very much. It was a woman, I think."

"One of his old loves, perhaps," said her mother. "When is he coming up to town?"

"Some day next week. I asked him to stay here, but he declined, saying he would go back to this old chambers. However, I dare say we shall see a good deal of him."

Christabel's presence made a very great deal of difference in the house in Park Lane. She was constantly going out and coming in. Calls arrived and dinner parties were given, at which Lady Seagrave was forced to take the head of the table, although she would infinitely have preferred the quiet of her boudoir—but Christabel was an exacting young lady, and generally contrived to persuade her mother to do what she liked.

Helena had more leisure, but she did not care for the change, for she had a sort of idea that Miss Seagrave did not like her, and was angry with her mother for having engaged a companion. This was partly true. Christabel, quite conscious of her own beauty, did not relish the idea of being in the same house with a woman whom she was bound to confess was much handsomer than herself, and would certainly have preferred Helena should leave before she had been seen by any of her friends. She had hinted to Lady Seagrave the advisability of not adding to the expenses of the household by another member; but her hints were in vain, for the elder lady was really fond of Helena, and utterly declined parting with her.

Our heroine's state of mind at this time was not enviable. She had seen from a page of the society papers that Vane was in London, and knew that she might at any moment be brought face to face with him; the consequence of this knowledge resulted in a nervous excitement which she was utterly powerless to control. Suppose she met him in the presence of Christabel, and lost her self-possession!

After all, her fears were groundless, for when she did meet him she was alone in Lady Seagrave's boudoir, busily employed in mending some costly old lace belonging to Christabel. The lace dropped from her nerveless fingers, and she started to her feet with a low, half-stifled exclamation as he entered, while he gazed at her for a moment in mute surprise; then he took a hasty step forward, and held out both his hands.

"Is it really you?" he exclaimed. "What piece of good fortune brings you here?"

She did not reply immediately, for, truth to tell, no words would come in answer to his greeting. The sweet tell-tale colour rushed into her cheeks, and she made a half-shrinking backward movement, whose meaning he misinterpreted.

"I beg your pardon. I fear my inquiry was rude," he said, hastily. "Of course, I have no right to ask you questions, except the right bestowed on me by the gratitude I feel for your kindness during my illness."

"You are quite well now?" she said, ignoring his question and apology alike, and looking half anxiously into his face—a brown, sun-

burnt face, bearing upon it the unmistakable imprint of health.

"Quite well—thanks to your good nursing. By-the-way, why did you not wish me goodbye before leaving as you did?"

"Because I had to go away so hurriedly. Affairs in England called me back," in some confusion, "and I had no time for farewells. Have you seen Lady Seagrave yet?"

"No. I thought I should find her here." "She is out driving with her daughter, but," glancing at the clock, "I don't think she will be away much longer."

"I am not anxious for her return," declared the officer, boldly, and without removing his eyes from his companion's face. "I cannot tell you how glad I am to meet you again, Nurse Monica!"

"You are very good," she faltered, with downcast eyes.

He laughed as if amused.

"I am afraid if you accused me of being very selfish it would be nearer the mark. However, we will not dispute the point. Are you—may I be permitted to ask—living in London?"

"I am living here."

"Here!"

"Yes, as nurse, or, to speak more correctly, companion to your aunt."

"Indeed!" he said, looking surprised.

Without having any reason for his opinion, it struck him as incongruous that this queenly-looking girl should occupy a subordinate position in his aunt's household—should be accepting wages like any other servant, for, from the inquiries he had made, he was aware that her services in Africa had been entirely voluntary.

There was another awkward silence between them; he broke it by saying, in a slightly constrained manner:—

"What am I to call you? I have never been able to find out your name, for no one seemed to know it in the regiment, and I suppose it won't do for me to address you as 'Nurse Monica' now?"

"My name is Monica Burn," she answered, shortly, while a deep red flushed her face, and her fingers twisted in and out of each other in the old way he remembered so well. "A strange name, is it not?"

"It is far from a common one, if that is what you mean."

"That being so, there is the less danger of your forgetting it."

"There never could be the least danger of my forgetting it," he returned gravely, wondering at the sudden awkwardness that seemed to have fallen upon her, and at the colour that changed so rapidly in her cheeks.

At this moment, while they both stood opposite the other, each more or less embarrassed, the door was pushed open and Christabel Seagrave stood on the threshold.

She looked from her cousin to Helena, noted the blush that deepened on the latter's face, and at once came to a mental conclusion on the situation. She gave no hint, however, of what this conclusion was, but came forward and held out her hand to Vane.

"I am so glad to see you. How long have you been here?"

"Not long. I have only just come," answered Vane, who really thought he spoke the truth, for time had gone so swiftly that he had been unaware of its flight.

Christabel's lip curled slightly, for she had been informed downstairs that Lord Seagrave was in the boudoir, and that he had been waiting there for nearly half an hour. She turned round sharply to speak to Helena, but the girl had taken advantage of the momentary diversion effected by Miss Seagrave's entrance to quietly leave the room; and Christabel was far too accomplished a woman of the world to accuse her cousin of the untruth he had unwittingly told. She seated herself in a low chair close by the window, and removed her hat, glancing at the same moment into the

opposite mirror to see that the tangled disorder of her fair hair was picturesque and becoming.

"You have been in town two or three days, haven't you?" she said.

"Yes."

"How is it you did not come to see us before?"

His eyes fell a little uneasily, like those of a man who felt that the ground beneath his feet was not quite so solid as it might have been.

"Oh, I don't know. I have had such a lot to do, business matters that couldn't be put off."

"You have altered, Vane! There was a time when any business matters would have been put off for the sake of an interview with me."

"Yes, my dear Christabel—of course; but you see I was not quite sure of an interview with you. You go out so much, and have such claims laid upon you by society that there is always the risk of not finding you at home."

"A note would have made the fact an assured one."

"Would it? You are very kind—much kinder than I deserve, I am afraid. By the way, where is my aunt?"

"In her dressing-room. Are you in a great hurry to see her?"

"I am, rather." He drew out his watch.

"The fact is I have an appointment at my club in twenty minutes' time, so you see I have not much leisure. Do you think I might venture to knock at your mother's door and tell her so?"

"Certainly!"

He went out of the room, and, as he left, a strange change came over Christabel's face—a change that made it look fully ten years older. The features hardened, the lips set themselves together in a straight line, and a gleam like unshed steel came into her eyes.

"Am I going to lose him after all?" she muttered, pressing her hands tightly across her chest. "Has he ceased to care for me, or has this nurse's face taken his fancy? Men are fickle, I know, but I thought he loved me too well ever to change."

She got up and walked backwards and forwards across the room, the hardness in her eyes deepening every moment.

A dangerous woman to offend!—a woman who knew her own beauty, and, exulting in the consciousness of the power it gave her, would resent with a deadly bitterness any attempt at rivalry. A woman, moreover, of strong will and passions, combining a man's capacity with a woman's tenacity of purpose, and caring little for the price she paid, so long as she achieved the object upon which she had set her heart!

CHAPTER IX.

Lord Seagrave was very assiduous in his attentions to his aunt, and his visits to the pretty little house in Park Lane were very numerous. He usually came in the morning, when he was pretty sure of finding her at home; and on these occasions Helena sat in a corner of the room, sewing or knitting, and occasionally taking part in the conversation—for Lady Seagrave usually made a point of requesting her not to leave, as her presence was not felt in the least degree as a restraint. Perhaps this was, in a sense, the happiest part of our heroine's life. Once more she felt that sense of youth which had deserted her after her marriage, accompanied by a feeling of liberty to which she had long been a stranger. Her shyness overcame, she talked with the unconstraint natural to her; and Lady Seagrave, as well as her nephew, felt the charm of her freshness and originality.

Christabel was not often present in the boudoir, for her manifold society engagements really left her little time; besides which, she hardly knew how to control her anger at what she called her mother's foolishness in permitting the nurse so much of an equality.

Sometimes Helena went out shopping with the two ladies, and it happened on one of

these occasions that as she was stepping from the victoria she caught sight of William Compton in the distance, and paused in indecision as to whether she should wait and speak, or go into the shop and thus avoid him.

A quick gesture of his hand made her adopt the former alternative, after a hasty whisper to Lady Seagrave that she had met a friend and wished to speak to him.

When her two companions had disappeared inside the shop, she greeted her former patient with some slight coolness, which might have been attributed to the fact that Mr. Compton's eyes were a little too bright, and his cheeks too flushed for perfect sobriety.

"Dear me, what a swell we are!" he remarked, sneeringly, as he glanced at the carriage, with its pair of well-groomed horses. "We are so grand that we don't care to be seen associating with such a seedy person as I am."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Helena, drawing nearer the shop windows, so as to be out of earshot of the coachman. "How is it that you are walking about at this time of the day—have you taken a holiday from the office?"

"A holiday for good!" he answered, grimly. "The fact is, I couldn't stand being boxed up there any longer, so I took French leave last Monday morning, and haven't been near the cursed place since!"

"But what are you going to do?" in dismay.

He shrugged his shoulders and lighted a cigarette with fingers that shook very considerably.

"Goodness knows—I'm sure I don't. I suppose I must look out for another crib, and in the meantime fall back on your generosity for a loan."

"Indeed, you must do nothing of the sort! I am poor myself, and it is out of my power to help you to any great extent."

"Still, I suppose you won't refuse me a sovereign? You might give it me now."

"I cannot do that, for the simple reason that I have not my purse with me."

"That's a pity. Well, I'll come to Park Lane—I know the number—and you can give it me this evening."

Helena would have indignantly refused to have blackmail thus levied upon her had she not seen that the man was really the worse for liquor, and in a mood when it would have been dangerous to cross his wishes for fear of a scene—which she naturally wished to avoid.

"You must not come to Park Lane," she said, hastily; "but I will send you the sovereign in a letter, which will be the same thing."

"No, it won't!" he answered, with dogged sullenness. "But if you're too proud to have me come to the house I'll meet you outside anytime you like to appoint. The fact is, I want the cash this evening; and have it I must, or I'll make it jolly disagreeable for some of you!"

He looked at her with sullen determination, and at this precise juncture Christabel Seagrave came to the door of the shop, accompanied by Vane, whom she had met inside. They both fixed their eyes on Helena and her companion, and the former felt a guilty flush rise to her face under their scrutiny. At all hazards she must get rid of Compton now!

"I will meet you at the corner of Mount Street at nine o'clock this evening," she said, in a quick whisper; "and now, for Heaven's sake, go away!"

He obeyed, sulkily enough. It is true, and after a glance at Miss Seagrave and her cousin, both of whom he already knew by sight.

The incident had a very disagreeable effect on Helena, who fancied—and not altogether without reason—that it had a suspicious appearance in the eyes of Christabel.

Lord Seagrave accompanied them home, and was very silent during the drive. He was a man pretty well versed in the ways of the world, and capable of giving a very shrewd guess as to the characters of the people with

whom he was brought into contact, and one glance had been quite sufficient to assure him that Mr. Compton was one of those gentlemen who may be classed under the generic term of "shady."

"Who was he? What had he to do with Helena?" he asked himself. "He was not her brother, for there was not the faintest trace of family resemblance between them, and certainly it was hard to believe she would select such a person as her friend."

Lord Seagrave was puzzled, and ever and anon stole a side glance at Helena, which had the effect of greatly embarrassing her.

She was glad when they reached home; and on the plea of not feeling well she got Lady Seagrave to excuse her and went to her own room, where she remained all the afternoon, thinking over the falseness of the position in which she was placed, and doubtful whether, after all, her conduct had been justifiable.

In the evening, as the time of her appointment drew near, she grew nervous, and Christabel, who happened to be at home, noticed the fact, and wondered what had caused it.

Lady Seagrave dined at half-past seven; consequently, at nine o'clock she might always be trusted to be asleep, and Helena was therefore "off duty."

This evening was no exception to the rule, so as the clocks were striking, our heroine stole quietly downstairs, trusting to her shrouding black cloak and thick veil to help her in escaping notice.

As it happened, she was destined to disappointment, for no less a person than Miss Seagrave herself met her in the hall, and she was forced to come to a standstill.

"Is it you, Miss Burn?" in an accent of astonishment. "Are you going out?"

"Only for a few minutes," faltered Helena. "I have a headache, and I thought a breath of fresh air would do me good."

Christabel looked incredulous.

"It is rather late for you to be out alone."

"I don't mind that, and I shall not be away long," Helena said, a little resentful at the manner in which the remark was made.

And as she spoke she slipped past Miss Seagrave into the hall, and out through the front door.

After she had gone Christabel stood for a moment in a doubtful attitude, then went upstairs to her dressing-room, where a middle-aged woman, of somewhat unprepossessing aspect, sat sewing. This was her maid, who had been with her for over ten years, and who—to do her justice—was thoroughly devoted to her mistress's interests.

"Gervel," said Miss Seagrave, "I want you to follow Miss Burn, who has just gone out, and keep her in view. She is too young and too pretty to roam the streets at this time of night alone!"

Gervel shot a furtive glance at the speaker as she put away her work, and rose. She was quite aware that her mistress had some other motive besides solicitude for Helen's welfare, but what that motive was it did not concern her to inquire.

"I suppose you don't want Miss Burn to see me following her?" she observed, interrogatively.

"Certainly not!"

It did not take Gervel two minutes to slip on cloak and bonnet, and when she had gone Christabel returned to the drawing-room, where a few minutes later Lord Seagrave was announced. As he greeted her he glanced round the room, and seemed a little embarrassed to find they were alone.

"Mother is asleep," she observed, as if in answer to his unspoken question, "and we are expecting no visitors to-night, so you will be dull if you intend honouring us with your company for long."

"Dull in your presence?" he exclaimed, gallantly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not think you find my presence so attractive as your words would imply, otherwise you would seek it oftener."

He pulled his moustache in some embarrassment, and murmured an excuse about the numerous claims of society.

"Society!" she echoed scornfully. "You are the very last man in the world to become its slave, and even if it were so, you would yet find time to see me oftener, supposing you wished to do so." She paused a moment, furling and unfurling her fan as she stood opposite him, with the soft light of the rose-shaded lamps, lending an added charm to her beauty, and her eyes fixed on the floor. Suddenly she raised them and looked fully into his, while she came a few steps nearer. "Vane!" she exclaimed, impulsively, "I must come to a full understanding with you, for it is quite impossible for us to go on in this way any longer. Before you went to India you told me you loved me—asked me to be your wife—swore than no other woman would take my place, and that life without me would be misery! Do you remember?"

"I remember," he said, gravely, while a deep red stained the bronzed pallor of his face, "and I also remember that you refused me!"

"What was I to do? I had no alternative. You were much too poor to keep a wife, and my father absolutely forbade our marriage; besides, you were deeply in debt!"

"I know that. I know quite well that it was madness to hope you would defy your father, poverty, and the world, for my sake; and yet, if you had done so, a great deal of misery would have been spared!"

"You loved me then, Vane?"

"I did—I loved you with the first passion of youth, and to me you were even more a goddess than a woman; but you refused my love, and so—" He paused. "It is hard for a man to tell a woman a truth that he knows will wound her, and Vane Christolm was no braver in this respect than the rest of his sex."

"Well," she exclaimed, bending forward a little to hear his reply. He did not speak, but kept his eyes fixed on the ground, and after a few moments' pause, she added, in a low, strained tone, "Do you mean the love is dead, Vane?"

"Yes," he said, looking up, and speaking firmly. "It is quite—quite dead, and the memory of it is like some far away pain, whose sting has vanished. It is hard to speak thus to you, Christabel; but it is better that you should know the truth!"

"Yes," she murmured, "it is much better; but let me ask you one question, Vane. Has a new love taken the place of the old one?" She stopped again, and looked at him eagerly, then before he could speak, continued, "You need not tell me, I can see the answer in your face! Who is the woman?"

"Do you think you have any right to put such a question, Christabel?"

"Yes!" passionately, "I have every right. Am I not your cousin—your nearest relative, and do I not take more interest in your welfare than anyone else?"

Vane looked undecided. He could not quite understand her, for he was not a conceited man, and the true solution of her conduct, if it occurred to him, gave him no clue to her motive for questioning him thus.

"I'll be candid with you, Christabel," he said, at last, "for, as you say, you are—with the exception of your mother—the only kith and kin I have in the world, and I believe you would be really glad to see my happiness secured. Well then, I am in love, and with an inmate of this house—Monica Burn!"

Christabel drew a quick, deep breath, and sat down on a low ottoman near, but in such a position that her face was in the shadow. She was a woman of the world, skilled in the art of concealing her feelings, and even now while a tumult of passionate wrath rioted through her veins, there was no sign in her features beyond an added flush to tell of more than ordinary emotion.

"Have you told Miss Burn this?" she asked presently, in her low, even tones.

"No; I have been afraid to do so, for fear

of her refusing me. I thought I would wait until she knew me better."

"You need not have been afraid," Christabel interrupted, scornfully. "A girl in her position is not likely to remain insensible to the charms of wealth, and a title."

"That might apply to some girls, but I am sure it would have no weight with her," he declared, with grave conviction. "I am sure she is one of the purest and most single-hearted girls in the whole universe—a girl for whose sake the world would be well lost!"

CHAPTER X.

Helena found William Compton awaiting her at the appointed place, but her interview was far from a satisfactory one; and almost as soon as she gave him the sovereign she regretted having yielded to his threat, for he evidently regarded it as a sign of fear on her part, and made no secret of his exultation.

"You're wise," he said, with half tipsy gravity. "You've got a jolly comfortable berth, and you're wise to stick to it; but I should like you to remember that if you don't keep good friends with me you'll stand a very good chance of being asked to clear out, for it isn't likely Lady Seagrave would care to have a person in her house who goes under a false name, and who makes out she is single, while all the time she is married."

"You have no business to say such things," exclaimed Helena, indignantly. "What Lady Seagrave likes or dislikes is nothing to do with you."

"Oh, isn't it? Perhaps I know more about Lady Seagrave and Lord Seagrave than you do—perhaps I have a friend in the house who keeps me well posted up in all that goes on at No. —, Park Lane, and who keeps a particularly sharp eye on you, my lady!"

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind what I mean. I know what I know, and that is, that while I'm out of a berth I shall expect you to give me half your salary, and if you cut up rough I shall then send a letter to Lady Seagrave, and then there will be a nice fuss. D—n it all!" he exclaimed, working himself up into a fury, "oughtn't you to have married me years ago, and then shouldn't we both be rich enough to enjoy ourselves as we liked, instead of having to earn every paltry shilling before we have a chance of spending it?"

To argue with him while he was in this mood would have been the height of foolishness, so Helena did not attempt it; but as soon as she could get away she left him, and hurried back home quite unconscious of the fact that she was being watched by the lynx eyes of Mrs. Garvel—for Miss Seagrave's maid was a widow, and queened it over the rest of the servants by virtue of the dignity of being a matron.

Our heroine's meditations were far from pleasant as she reflected over her interview, for it seemed quite clear that William Compton would use to the uttermost the power he held, and he could certainly make her position extremely uncomfortable, to say the least. Indeed, if he really told Lady Seagrave that she was masquerading under an assumed name, her dismissal would follow as a matter of course, for in this kind of thing her ladyship was extremely particular, and would not have hesitated in sacrificing her personal liking for her young companion. Of course Helena had the alternative of leaving of her own free will, but from this course she shrank with untold repugnance, for did it not mean an eternal farewell to Vane, and was not the time spent in his society like moments stolen from Paradise?

Over and over again she had told herself how worse than foolish it was to yield to the delight of the spell he had cast upon her, for the time must surely come when they would be separated, and when he would wed the woman whose name had been on his lips when he was delicious—Christabel. But for all that, she would have given five years of her life rather than go, for the future seemed

so vague, and far away in comparison with the near delight of the present.

And so she stayed on, feeling all the time like a woman standing beside a precipice, under whose feet the ground may at any moment give way. She saw Vane frequently, for he paid daily visits to Park Lane, and as he generally selected the morning for his calls it followed that he and Helena saw a great deal of each other. In point of fact, if it had not been for William Compton, and his constant drain on her purse, she would have been, comparatively speaking, happy; but the latter grew more and more insatiate in his demands until at last she determined to flatly refuse to give him another farthing.

This occurred one evening towards the end of May, when she had met him in Hyde Park, and, as may be imagined, he did not receive her ultimatum at all kindly.

"I mean what I say," she declared, firmly. "You are as well able to get your living as I am, and there is no earthly reason why I should support you in idleness."

"You know what the consequences will be if you don't give me what I want," he muttered, threateningly.

"I know that you are a coward—cruel, callous, and unmanly!" with indignation. "And I also know that henceforward I shall refuse to submit to your abominable demands. Of course, you can tell your tale to Lady Seagrave if you like, but you will gain nothing by it, even if you succeed in getting me turned out of the house."

"Do you call that nothing?" he sneered. "I cannot agree with you, for it seems to me a great deal. You are quite mistaken if you suppose you are going to get rid of me so easily, my lady. I am not the sort of man you can shake off whenever you please, and I will let you know it. Recollect, it is not only Lady Seagrave I can tell of your having given yourself out for dead, and assumed a false name; but other people as well, to whom you may apply for a situation in the future."

Helena shivered involuntarily, less at the words than the tone in which they were uttered.

She knew quite well that she was dealing with a man utterly dead to all feelings of honour or shame—a man who would use the power he held without compunction—who would even glory in wringing from her the last farthing she possessed. But her face betrayed no sign of fear as she met his gaze, with imperial scorn in her eyes.

"Do your worst!" she exclaimed. "And whatever it may be I defy you."

She would have turned away as she spoke, but he caught her arm and detained her.

"Mind what you are doing!" he said. "I am not a man to threaten things and not perform them."

"I decline to talk to you any longer. Let me go. Do you hear? Let me go!"

Unconsciously she raised her voice, striving as she spoke to free herself from his hold.

They were in a lonely part of the Park, and it was growing dusk. There were few pedestrians about, and the knowledge of this fact may have emboldened Compton, for he did not release her, and Helena, growing thoroughly frightened, exclaimed,

"I will call for help if you do not let me go!"

Hardly were the words out of her mouth before they were answered, and in the person of Vane, Lord Seagrave.

"Loose that lady immediately!" he said, sternly, stepping up to the group and recognising Helena with a faint thrill of disagreeable surprise at beholding her in so compromising a situation.

"What business is it of yours?" demanded Compton, insolently. "You mind your own concerns and don't interfere with other people's!"

"It is so far my concern that if you don't take your hand off the lady this moment I shall be under the necessity of knocking you down!" was the calm rejoinder.

Compton took no notice of the warning, and in another moment—almost in less time than it takes to write—he reeled backwards, half stunned by the effects of a blow administered by the soldier, who drew Helena to his side and pulled her arm through his.

"There is my card," he said, flinging it on the ground at Compton's feet. "If you like to seek redress in the police-courts you are at liberty to do so."

Then he drew Helena rapidly from the spot, and did not pause until they were well out of earshot.

"You are trembling," Vane said, anxiously. "I am afraid that our frightened you."

"I was frightened—a little," she answered, with a tremulous smile.

"I should like to have thrashed him well—the scoundrel! By-the-way, I fancy I have met him before, but I cannot remember where." Lord Seagrave paused suddenly, for in the very midst of his sentence there came a recollection of the day when he and Christabel had seen the young nurse in conversation with this self-same man. Speaking on the impulse of the moment, he added, "You know him?"

"Yes—unfortunately I do."

He looked keenly down into her face, but there was no guilt in it—only a profound regret, and as he saw it he drew a deep breath of relief. Clearly the man was not her lover, as, just for one moment, he had feared he might be.

By this time Helena had partly recovered her self-possession, and so she drew her arm from under her companion's, and came to a standstill.

"I am much obliged for your escort, Lord Seagrave," she said, her voice not quite so steady as usual, "but I need not detain you any longer now. I am not afraid of being molested again."

"Nevertheless you must permit me to see you home," he returned, gravely. "It is too dark for you to be out alone."

"I shall be all right, I assure you."

"Allow me to be the best judge of that. Besides," he added, with emphasis, "it will give me great pleasure to walk with you. We have few opportunities of being together alone, and there is a great deal I want to say to you."

"To me, Lord Seagrave?" she faltered.

"To you, Miss Burn—to you, Monica, if you will allow me to call you so. Stay here under this tree a moment, and then I will try to put into words what has so long lain in my heart."

She complied as unresistingly as if she were obeying some magic mandate against which she was powerless to rebel. The park was very quiet, and well-nigh deserted. Through the rifts of the boughs above their heads the stars shone down with a veiled, misty sort of radiance, which deepened the charm of the scented dusk, and the roar of the great city was subdued into a murmur that hardly disturbed the silence. It was one of those soft, warm, balmy May evenings, instinct with a subtle spell of Spring beauty.

Vane paused a few moments before he spoke. Perhaps by some strange magnetic influence he was thinking of another scene that had occurred in Hyde Park seven years ago, when a woman had asked him to wed her, and he had welcomed the suggestion as a means of escape from an intolerable burden of debt. He could not think of that now without a flush of shame rising to his brow.

"Can you guess what I want to say to you, Monica?" he asked, at length.

She raised her eyes, and replied in the negative with purest innocence. In effect, the revelation of his true feelings could not prove other than a surprise to her, for she had been so convinced of his love for Christabel that she had taken their ultimate union almost as an accomplished fact.

"I want to place my happiness in your hands, my life at your feet," he went on, with a simple directness that redeemed his words from any suspicion of exaggeration. "I don't

(Continued on page 208 of this No.)

THE EYES OF THE PICTURE

By the Author of "For Silk Attire," etc., etc.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Violet Marden, stung to the quick by the neglect of the man who calls himself her husband, and driven to desperation by his callous and inhuman treatment of her, in a fit of temporary madness would have made an end of her life by drowning. Seven years have gone by, and Violet Marden, now known as Mrs. Herbert, has almost forgotten this unhappy episode. She is quite a favourite among certain artists, and as one of her "At Homes," Leigh Erlscourt is introduced to her. Mrs. Herbert recognises him as her preserver, and would like to tell him how she has blessed him a thousand times since that day. Leigh sees Mrs. Herbert frequently, and his friends and relations are curious of his interest in a woman whose past is shrouded in mystery. Mrs. Herbert visits Leigh's studio to look at a picture he is painting. It is that of the woman who would have destroyed herself for his timely aid, and it is with difficulty Mrs. Herbert controls herself at this critical moment. Mrs. Challenger, who is the soul of propriety, hears of her brother's infatuation for this "unknown woman," and earnestly remonstrates with him on his folly, but all to no purpose. Leigh does not realise it yet but he has met his fate, and if it is folly he must pay the price. Violet tries to prevent Leigh speaking the word which she is all the time longing to hear. But such whole-hearted devotion cannot be suppressed, and it is when he has declared his passion that Violet tells him of the dark page in her history. Henceforth Leigh has but one object, to discover, and if possible secure punishment to the man who has brought so much sorrow into his dear one's short life.

CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

AT a signal, an attendante brought fresh cards.

"Another bottle of wine, Williams!" began Verner, when Erlscourt interposed.

"No, Verner; allow me," and he gave the order to the servant, who presently brought the wine and the glasses.

"Do you know," said Verner, filling his glass, "that you've ordered the best wine in the place, and King keeps some prime stuff? What an extravagant dog you are!"

"What's the good of money if you don't spend it?" said the other, beginning to deal.

"I can't imagine where you get such a lot. Is it true that you've sold most of those pictures?"

"Most of them. Why shouldn't I enjoy life while I can? When there is nothing more to spend is time enough to put on sackcloth. At present we only want one thing more to make perfection."

"Women," said Verner, bursting into a roar of laughter, "wine, women, and dice, or cards, which is it? But, deuce take me, Erlscourt, what a sly one you are!"

Erlscourt laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"One can't take all the world into one's confidence," he said, "but you—"

"I'm one of the same sort, eh? Right you are; no sanctimonious squeamishness about me. You've found that out. I am not obliged to play the hypocrite. I am not obliged to keep up a good reputation. I've had some fine games in my time."

"Well, let's hear some of them," said Erlscourt, pushing the wine towards him.

"I always did say to George," said Verner, slipping out the more familiar name, then pulling himself up; seeing which, Erlscourt said, in a puzzled way—

"George!"

"I was going to say George King. Well, I was saying I always said to him that I didn't believe but what you were as wild as the rest of us, only you kept more dark."

"Wiser, eh?" said Erlscourt, with a significant look. "Your glass is empty, don't spare the wine. Now then for your story. It isn't fair to raise hopes you don't satisfy."

"But, I say, Erlscourt," said Verner, with the stupid persistency of a man not quite sober, and this last bottle of wine was certainly strong, "why the deuce were you so dark?"

"Didn't I tell you I was wise? I don't mind trusting you now, but I haven't known you so very long."

"Oh, I see."

Then he launched into the sort of story which men such as he delight in, but which Erlscourt had always refused to listen to in his earliest manhood.

He could have killed the wretched profligate who sat there boasting in coarse language of his prowess; yet he only smiled with a slightly superior air.

"Pooh, that's common-place enough!" he said. "Your deal, Verner."

"Oh, is it common-place, indeed?" retorted Verner, piqued. "Just you listen. My deal, is it?"

"Yes," said Erlscourt, on fire with impatience, but still maintaining the incredulous smile on his lips that he knew would have an effect on Verner's vanity.

Verner dealt the cards with the uncertain deliberation that belongs to his stage of inebriety.

Erlscourt gave a quick glance round. Their table was set apart, so that they were almost alone; the rest of the men were intent on their own games, discussing the racing news, or making bets. George King he knew was out.

"Common-place, indeed!" half growled Verner, still handling the cards; the accusation evidently rankled a great deal more than if Erlscourt had called him a scoundrel. "I'll tell you something that isn't common-place at all."

"You're such a devotee of a time telling it," said Erlscourt, dryly, leaning back.

"Not at all. It was just this way," said Verner, eagerly, and going on with the game. "She was awfully pretty, a little school-girl down in the country, a lady, you understand, and not the ordinary sort. Upon my honour I had a sort of fancy for her."

He chuckled to himself, filling up another glass of wine.

Erlscourt had turned white as death; he could only grope blindly, as it were, after the one thought that could save him from self-betrayal. He had almost sworn he felt the magic touch, heard the pleading voice—"For my sake!"

No one seeing him would have noticed anything but that he sat considering his cards—intent, as a careful player should be. He knew that he felt as if a look, a word of his, would have shattered his self-control.

"A school-girl!" he repeated, lifting his head, and with all his efforts his voice sounded changed to his own ear. "For shame, Verner; you might let such pieces of innocence alone!"

He might seem shocked without fear. It was not his rôle to pose as a profligate, that would have been to go too far to deceive Verner; but the very sense that he was rather shocked stimulated Verner's self-satisfaction in the blackest sin of his life.

"But such a charming one!" said he. "I was vegetating down there"—he had a curious amount of caution through all—"in fact, if you want to know, hiding from my creditors; and what's a fellow to do in a dull hole like that but to make love to the prettiest girl he can find?"

"There's something in that argument—stolen meetings, rambles by moonlight in leafy lanes, forbidden letters—"

The man stopped, half-choked with the burning thoughts his own words called up.

The next instant he laughed lightly.

"Yes, there's nothing else to do, of course. I can find some excuse. And a fellow gets led on."

"Exactly. You understand the thing au

fond," said Verner, delightedly. "You're a rare good comrade. But the worst of it is, a girl like that won't be made a toy, and cast off when one is tired of it."

"I suppose she would have some objections to it. Some men wouldn't have much hesitation in getting over that."

Again he checked himself before he had lost his self-mastery; again his heart went out to the lonely woman who had no other hope or faith in life but himself. He added—

"But it wants deception in some way—either a promise of marriage, or—I was going to say—a false marriage, but that's too risky. It might be possible"—he leant back again, seeming to glance over the room, but letting his eyes drop on Verner every now and then—"to so manage that she believed a real marriage illegal—void—"

"What the devil are you talking about?" exclaimed Verner, savagely, and his hand went to the breast pocket of his coat. "Who said I married her? I didn't. I wasn't much a fool!"

"Heaven! give me patience!" was the cry in the other's heart. "There is no other help!"

For his strength was snapping, and even his darling's voiceless prayer was hushed, almost silenced, in the storm within him.

"Of course not," he said. "I was imagining a case. You must have been irresistible, Verner, in your giddy youth—for I suppose this happened some years ago?"

"Some years—yes. No, I didn't marry her," repeated Verner, doggedly, again putting his hand in his coat pocket, unwitting of the watchful eyes opposite him. "Curse her! How she looked at me!—like that picture!"

"What picture?"

"Oh! never mind," answered Verner, hastily. "Your play!"

They played in silence for a little while—Erlscourt blindly, and Verner taking every allowable and unallowable advantage—as he had done many a time.

Then the painter said:—

"Did you ever hear what became of her? I suppose she went back to her home?"

"Married again, I dare say," said Verner, with a short laugh, not noticing the slip of expression—and it suited Erlscourt not to notice him. All he said was:—

"You're not touching the wine, Verner. Let me pour you out another glass. Perhaps you're tired of that? I'll order up some other. What will you like?"

"No, thanks; this is first-rate!" answered Verner, tossing off the best part of a glassful.

So far Erlscourt was forced to give up the idea under which he had suggested the change of wine.

He had little fear that the refusal was a consequence of suspicion of himself—there was not the slightest ground for that. It was rather the habitual caution asserting itself, even through confusion of the senses—the same caution that had kept him from even once mentioning the place where he had wooed the pretty school-girl.

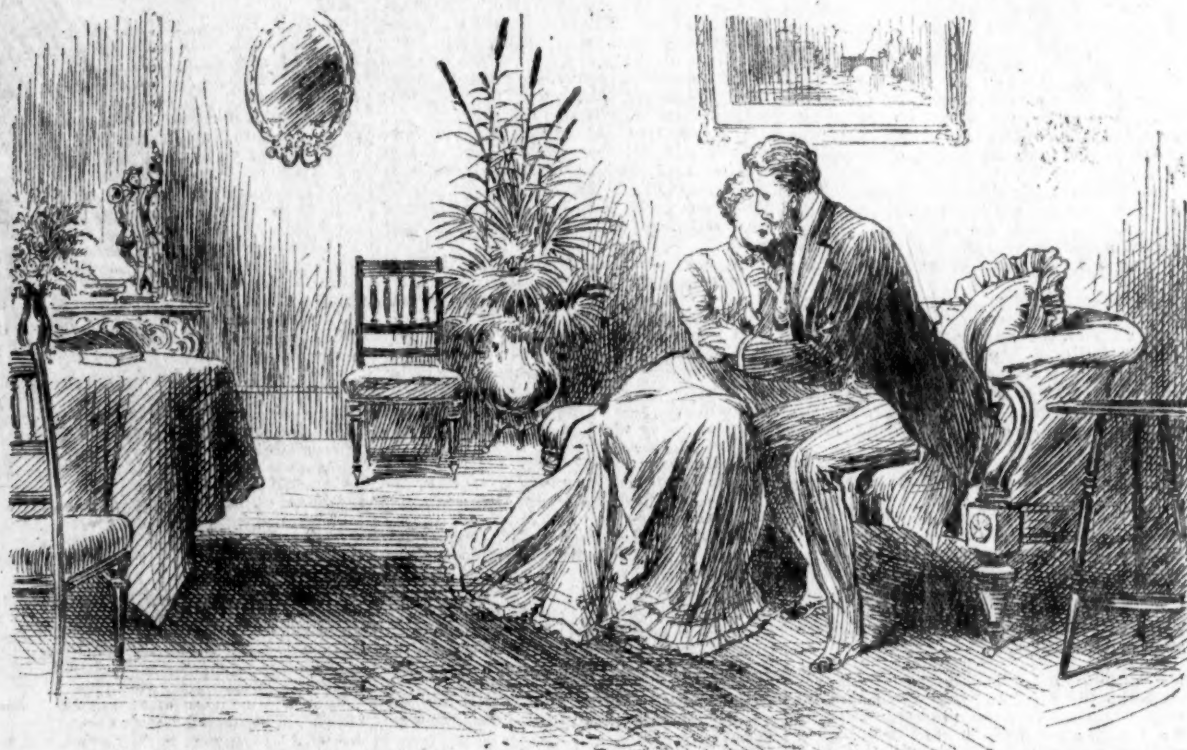
"You haven't vindicated your assertion," Erlscourt said, presently. "It's not so very uncommon—the same sort of thing happens often enough."

"Oh! does it then," said Verner, mysteriously. "I say, Erlscourt, you'll keep dark; these sort of things—stupid mistakes in one's youth, you know."

"I understand. I shall say nothing, of course. After all, what's the great harm done? I don't believe in such innocence. I always did think girls in such case have a pretty shrewd idea what they are doing. I am not such a great believer in women—they are confoundingly artful."

"What a sensible fellow you are!" said Verner, with admiration. "I fancied once you were rather of the romantic sort."

"Well, I'm not, then—except in pictures," said Erlscourt. "I say, Verner, you're beating me; you'll be the ruin of me some day."



"LEIGH," VIOLET SAID, NESTLING IN HIS ARMS, "YOU WILL REMEMBER YOUR PROMISE AND KEEP IT."

"You play so carelessly," said Venner, with an exaggerated politeness, which anyone else save Erlscourt would have thought ludicrous. But he was not in the state to notice it—certainly not in this man.

"You're such a good player, that's how it is," said Erlscourt. "I shall have to give up playing with you, Venner."

"What! when we're such good friends? Oh, you mustn't do that," said Venner, sentimentally. "We'll have some fun together some of these nights; don't desert me."

Erlscourt forced himself not to yield to the sickening impulse that came over him. He had proved his point—which he had thought it just as well to prove—that Venner was not in any way out of humour with him. He let the game go on to the end, won a little, lost again, and finally rose in Venner's debt.

"Sorry I can't pay up to-night," he said. "I shan't be able to be down here for a few nights, and, besides, I'm afraid I'm rather cleared out."

"Never mind," said Venner, cordially; "quite at your convenience. Are you going? It's early."

"Past three—yes, I'm going. I have to work all day, Venner. You're a gentleman at large. Good night!"

He had to shake hands with him; his manner was perfect as usual. He said good-night to those he knew, smiling his bright smile.

Just as the porter closed the door behind him, and he stood for a second in the street—almost quiet at this time—a man passed slowly, looking up at the windows, a man whose figure and face Erlscourt knew he had seen somewhere, the more so as a look of recognition came into this person's eyes, though he made no sign otherwise, but walked on indifferently.

"I have it," said Erlscourt. "It's the man I've seen talking to Lucie at Violet's door—the

detective—what's his name—Hilliard. I think I see it."

He stood there waiting till the man had gone well out of sight of the club, then followed him, coming up with him at the corner of a side street. The man, hearing the step, turned, and as the painter joined him touched his hat respectfully.

"Do you want me, sir?" he said.

Of course he knew from Lucie all about Erlscourt and his relations with Violet—as far as she knew them.

"Yes, I do, but I don't want anyone else to know it," said Erlscourt, glancing back.

They turned out of the street.

"You're watching King's," began the painter, abruptly.

"Well, sir—"

"Oh, I don't want you affirm or deny it. I am quite sure of it."

"I can't say more, sir," said Hilliard, "than that I hope you'll keep clear of it. I shouldn't like to hear of your getting into any trouble."

"Thanks. I am quite sure of that. But I am going to ask you to do something for me which is equally against rules. Of course this watching will end in a raid. I have my own reasons for wanting to know about the time when that will take place."

"Mr. Erlscourt, I'm sure you wouldn't want to shield any of those people," said Hilliard; "but, still, sir, I don't like to refuse you, but I really daren't."

"I want to shield them!" said Erlscourt. "I give you my honour I would not lift a finger to help one of them. Nothing you say to me shall pass my lips. I want to know for an entirely private reason, which will not in the least interfere with the law."

"Well, sir, I know you'll keep your word, and I'll do what I can; but if the heads get hold of it—"

"They never will. Well, don't tell me the actual night, but what are not the nights!"

said Erlscourt, with an involuntary smile that went quickly.

"I'll do what I can, sir," repeated the man, amused. "It won't be immediately. One of our fellows was in the other night, but we want a bit more evidence yet."

"I won't forget your service, Hilliard," said Erlscourt, warmly, knowing the man too well to offer him money. "Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," said Hilliard, and stood looking after the tall figure stepping so lightly down the street.

"Sorry to see him in that crib. What can he go for? Well, I shan't tell my girl of this. It's between him and me, and, besides, she'd be telling Mrs. Herbert, and that would be the last thing he'd want."

CHAPTER XXIII.

The rapid drive home from King's Club had not been enough to lull into the semblance of calmness the tempest in Erlscourt's heart. He had no room just now to think of himself—of his own loss. Venner's brutal indifference to the wreck of a woman's honour, his coarse remarks, his utter heartlessness, had roused too many and fierce passions to be calmed down for many an hour.

And then there was his own triumph, not taken from in the least by any compunction as to the means he had employed. He had gained enough to act on further. Venner's sudden anger when the suggestion of deception had been made, his repeated denial that he had married the girl, his persistence that the story he had told was out of the common, pointed to a marriage. Above all, Erlscourt felt convinced that he had lighted on the hiding-place of whatever documentary evidence there might be—probably the certificate.

It was broad daylight when he entered his house, so quietly as to disturb no one, and went up to his studio. There was no need for immediate action, yet it was impossible for him to sit still or attend to anything else.

An antique-looking carved Italian cabinet stood in a corner of the room, and a drawer of this he unlocked, tossing out half-a-dozen things before he came to what he wanted—a very small revolver.

He examined it carefully—it wanted nothing but cleaning. This he set to work to do, fetching what he wanted noiselessly. We all know what it is to be so possessed by one subject as to feel it impossible to be drawn away from it—to be glad to do anything that is connected with it.

So Erlscourt felt this early summer morning. He did not yet feel the reaction of the strain—he was still too strung up for that. He did not either in any definite way think of Violet; of his own part in the future nothing at all.

What was in his mind was every incident of the past night, every word and look—a grim satisfaction in preparing his weapon and a steady laying of his plans. And all the while his face hardly changed—the brows slightly contracted, the lips never parting, and seemingly bloodless, the clear cheek still white, the dark eyes burning. The almost uncontrollable passions of the earlier hours had not cooled—only settled down into that deadly concentration, that ruthless purpose that, when the time comes, blazes out the more for its suppression.

He had no want or wish but to crush the man who had wronged Violet, and dared to boast of it; he did not even want to see Violet—he wanted nothing soft or tender near him—he would have gone from it, not sought it. This mood lasted till the Sunday; then he began to feel the need that the fever within him should be allayed.

So it was that, after luncheon, Violet saw him come into her drawing-room. He had made up his mind he could not go to his sister's that afternoon as promised—he could not bear it; but when he had told Violet what had passed, and they had talked it over, he felt it more in the nature of things to come back to life's daily duties.

There was magic in her mere presence, and she had been so quiet—not elated, not upset by this new hope; so that even he was half deceived into thinking that she was more doubtful than need be. What man is ever at all points quite clear about a woman? He never knew till afterwards how she had really taken his news, how that faint hope had been an agony to her in a way that none but a woman could altogether comprehend.

But, meanwhile, she had strengthened him by that soothing power of calmness, so that when she told him she thought he had better keep his engagement, he acquiesced without a word. On another point, though, he resisted even her power—he would not tell her what he intended doing.

"Very well," said Violet, seeing he would not yield, "but remember that any publicity will only injure me. I do not say you, because you will not listen to that; still, you must see that injury to you is also injury to me in every way."

"Am I likely to forget it, Violet?" he asked, almost reproachfully.

"Perhaps not; but there are points beyond which one would hardly wish a man to remember any considerations without the incentive I am trying to give you. I am not sure how far you can be trusted with a weapon in your hand. If you promise—"

"A thousand times!" he began, impetuously.

"Nay, once is enough. You will remember that it is given to me. Now, go and see your sister; don't let there be any miserable breach because of me," and her lip quivered.

Perhaps for once in her life she was glad to have him go—to be alone, to have no need of pretence—to be herself.

It was a curious change from this tragedy of hopes and fears to the even cheerfulness of the Challoner household. There was no one else present but himself and Greville. Mrs. Challoner had been brought up in the Erlscourt tenets of very High Churchism, but

she had not been able to withstand the bent of her precise formal nature, which inclined her to some curious touches of Puritanism. Dora had once sanely said Cousin Emily was a Puritan gone astray. Certainly Emily never would consent to seeing any but the members of her immediate family on Sunday—except lonely bachelors, like young Greville, who might otherwise misspend the day.

Erlscourt flung off any depression by force of will, and even keen-sighted Dora thought she had been mistaken in thinking, when he first came in, that he did not look himself. Emily was more affectionate than ever towards him, and very delighted to have him back again.

There was certainly a struggle between heart and conscience when, after tea, she asked if Dora was going to church, and who was going with her.

"I don't want to drag anyone out," said Dora.

They were in the garden, Erlscourt lying at his sister's feet, with his curly head propped on his hand while he read. He announced, without looking up, that Dora would have to do without his escort.

"That's very rude!" laughed Emily. "I am sure you haven't been to church to-day."

"That is a libel, Emmie—I have. Greville and I always go together, don't we, Grev? We're not reprobates. I don't feel good enough to go to-night. I daresay Grev. does, so he can go."

Having settled which, he lapsed into his book. Emily was the more pleased that she felt she had done her duty in urging him.

Dora rose with a hesitating glance at Greville, which he answered by a glance not at all hesitating; therewith the young lady felt, with a little flutter of her heart, that she was not making a martyr of him, and went to put on her hat.

Perhaps if Emily had at all penetrated the wickedness there may be in the heart of a young man in love she had not felt so satisfied that Greville was going in the way he should go. Once outside the door, and walking down by the canal westwards, he remarked casually:—

"It's a superb evening—it's a sin to be shut up."

"Then you are not good after all," said Dora. "You mustn't suggest not going to church."

"That's just what I want to suggest. I am sure you don't think me wicked."

"Oh, no."

She walked on, not quite easy in her mind, a little afraid of him.

"Come into the park," said Greville, with a sort of bold insinuation.

Dora laughed.

"I can't. What will Emily say?"

"What will you say?" he answered, looking into her eyes; and perhaps because the question seemed to be given a double meaning by that look of his the girl blushed.

It is said that when we are tempted there is always something to help us on further. The assistance in this case appeared in the form of the familiar and useful hansom, which Greville signalled without more ado, and put Dora in, telling the man to put them down at Gloucester Gate.

The drive was performed in silence, which was not broken till they got into the Gardens, at this hour full of people of the working classes, and many a pair of sweethearts, at whom Dora forbore to laugh as usual. She thought instead, compassionately:—

"Why shouldn't the poor things be happy?"

She chatted away on anything that came into her head, with many a qualm as to what Emily would say to her walking in Kensington Gardens with Morton Greville on Sunday evening.

There used to be a leafy dell down by the Round Pond that was almost a solitude—that, alas! has been done away with by some soulless mortal; but lovers, being non-gregarious

animals, will manage still to find in the old Gardens some nooks less frequented than other parts.

It was in some such quiet spot that Greville suddenly broke across the stream of Dora's made talk with the question:

"Dora, we are not to be such strangers again, are we?"

Dora did not rebuke the unwonted familiarity. The word had slipped his lips once before. She only answered, "she didn't know—she hoped not."

"Sit down here," said Greville, as they came to two chairs set invitingly under a great spreading tree.

Dora obeyed, remarking innocently that it was nice and cool, making no objection when Greville possessed himself of one of the daintily-gloved hands lying in her lap, except an instinctive movement as if to withdraw it, which had no effect but for him to make it a closer prisoner.

"Dora—darling!" he said, earnestly, "it rests with you. You must know—you do know—how I love you. If you will only let me keep this hand in mine—promise it—no one, nothing shall keep me away."

She made the sweetest picture of happy confusion, with the colour flitting across her cheek, and her eyes, half drooping, half shyly lifted.

There was enough in those eyes, brief as was the glimpse he caught of them, to make Greville stoop and cover the little hand with kisses.

This was certainly better than going to church, among hundreds of other people. It might be wicked to think so, but, nevertheless, these two would have thought it if they had not been too happy for any question of right and wrong to enter their young heads.

They had no idea of anything but themselves. They heard but as a sort of accompaniment to the song in their own hearts, the evening song of the birds in the trees around them.

They wandered, not in Kensington Gardens, but in some fairy glades, where no one walks but lovers.

Not even Emily disturbed them till it occurred to Dora that they must go home.

"And what shall I say to Emily?" she said, in dismay.

"Don't say anything—leave it to me."

When they got back, they found the table in the dining-room laid ready for supper, the lamps alight both there and in the drawing-room, but no one about.

They were still in the garden, just as the trunks had left them, their forms faintly visible in the deepening darkness—Arthur and his wife talking softly, Leigh apparently only listening.

Dora went down the steps, and crossed to the group, Greville following her. Erlscourt lifted his head as they came up.

"What an awful long sermon you must have had!" said he, wickedly.

"Taken a stroll after church?" said Challoner, innocently, while Dora cast an appealing glance at Greville.

"Who preached, Dora?" asked Emily, before he could speak.

"We haven't the least idea in the world," said Greville. "We went into the Park instead."

"I hope you won't mind, Emily," said Dora, nervously. "It was so lovely, and—"

"It was my fault," said Greville, trying to be very penitent.

"It was a very fine evening, certainly," said Emily, as amiably as she could, for though she was not best pleased, she was kind-hearted, and, besides, she could not tell a guest she thought him a delusion and a snare. "I am afraid, Mr. Greville, Leigh guaranteed too much for you!"

"You know, Mrs. Challoner," said the young man, "there is more than one shrine to worship at."

"Ah, well," said she, smiling, "run and take your hat off, Dora, my love, and we'll have supper."

Dora danced away. Ericcourt stretched out his hand to his friend, and Greville grasped it and held it for some seconds. It was too dark to see faces, else he alone would have read all that was in Ericcourt's.

Somehow, when they met at supper, they all seemed to understand each other. Emily had directly followed Dora, and probably Greville has said something to Challoner, for the latter kissed his young cousin when she came into the dining-room, and Leigh did more teasing than eating.

Emily looked beaming—probably too much of the woman to resist the influence of a love affair. Yet neither Greville nor Dora were selfish enough not to have each one maddening thought.

The contrast between himself and them must strike Ericcourt, and Dora involuntarily gave expression to that thought when Leigh was saying good-night to her, speaking earnestly, and asking her to forgive all his nonsense. She said she liked it.

"I should think you had quarrelled with me if you didn't chaff me! Besides, I wouldn't mind anything to-night!"

"Too happy!" he said, almost wistfully, looking down into the bright young face.

"I wish you were as happy," came suddenly from the depths of her warm little heart.

His face shadowed.

"Don't think of me, dear," he said, gently, "though you wouldn't be Dora if you didn't. Another kiss for the thought, in spite of Greville."

"Greville hasn't the slightest objection," said the owner of that name. And he need not have, for his good-night was sufficiently prolonged to tax Ericcourt's patience, waiting discreetly on the pavement outside. Perhaps sympathy made him merciful, for he forebore to utter a single complaint as they went home.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Is that you, Venner," said George King, looking up from a dirty account-book as Venner came into his room upstairs one morning.

"Myself, and none other," answered Venner, lounging to the table. "What the fiend are you after, George—cooking accounts?"

"I ain't cooking them, but they're jolly well done, anyhow!" rejoined George, with a guffaw at his own joke. "We've been doing very well, Venner."

"Glad to hear it. The place is always full—poor fools."

"Yes," said King, in a lower voice, "and that's just the reason I think it time to pull in our horns!"

"Go to the devil for a born idiot!" said Venner, contemptuously.

"You may sneer if you like, but I'm right and you're wrong," said King. "You're like the big speculators that go on and on till they get ruined, when, if they'd pulled up in reason, they'd have been flourishing. There's often just such a point, I've noticed, where people can stop, and ought to stop. When they don't they generally go to the bad."

"Poh!" said Venner. "You're showing the white feather because you fancy a few tecs. have been round."

"It ain't fancy. You know we had a warning, Venner."

"It wasn't a warning—you were frightened of one, and got hold of the policeman. Much you got out of him."

"It's very fine for you to be reckless," said George, rather wistfully. "You think no one knows but what you're just a member—and perhaps they don't. Most of the brunt would come on me."

"Don't be so chicken-hearted—go on and win," said Venner. He was less shrewd than his confederate, and he had more spirit—two things which made him less able to scent danger and more careless. "I've got some fine birds in my hand. There's Wilson and Ericcourt. He never wins—at least, not much. But we're the best of friends."

"Shows how much his friends are deceived in him, then," said George, "or he wouldn't

be your friend—nor mine either; for he's not proud at all, though he is the born gentleman."

"Which means to say I'm not," said Venner, laughing. "Well, I don't pretend to the good blood he has, but my people were gentle enough," and for an instant a shade came over his face—a softening shade. One could just imagine what he might have looked like when he wandered years ago in those country lanes with Violet Herbert. It passed quickly—the vague feeling that caused it could not hold place long in a heart deadened to all gentler thoughts. "But to return to what we were saying. Get that notion out of your head, George. Go on and prosper—and we'll retire with big fortunes."

"Better retire with little ones," responded Mr. King, "while we've got them."

"Who cares a fig for little fortunes? I'd rather risk everything in a blow for the big one. You go on quietly, and see if we don't hoodwink the tecs. They want a good lot of evidence to break in."

"No, they don't. Who was that new man in last night?"

Venner burst out into a roar of laughter.

"So that's what frightening you, is it, old man? Why that fellow—if you mean the one with light grey clothes and a dark beard and moustache—that was a friend of Tom Danby's; met him a month ago. Tom brought him here. He's all right. He's been here before. What a joke to think that swell-looking customer a tee!"

"Well, I'll let the matter drop for a bit," said George, "but take care."

Venner laughed again and left the room. Perhaps his eyes, as well as the eyes of most of the frequenters of King's, had lost their nice discrimination—those of them who ever had it—as to the gradations of swelledom. Anyhow, this is what, that very day, Detective Walter Hilliard wrote, in a disguised hand, in his lodging:—

"Our man was in again last night. He thinks G. V. is a proprietor along with the other. I think the date is the beginning of next week, but I'm not sure. I can't get exact information. Please burn this."

Ericcourt read this that evening, it having arrived by the last post. He read it twice, standing motionless in the middle of the room.

"Next week," he said. "I'll not forget this service, Hilliard," throwing the letter down on the hearth, lighting a match, and watching the paper burn till only the black shreds were left. Not all the chemistry in the world could have restored the faintest outline of a word. "This is a desperate venture of mine—it rests on too many chances. I wish I could manage it differently."

He stood watching the shreds at his feet curl away from each other and shrivel up. The task he had set himself was drawing to a close—a few days must, perforce, see the end of it, himself victor, or Edgar Marsden.

He knew what he meant to do—he did not know what the result would be, or even whether trivial circumstances would not baffle him altogether.

It had come, after all, to brute force, as he had known it must, very early in his acquaintance with Venner.

All the latter had ever said in his most unguarded moments was not enough to commit him. Even when overcome with wine he had been cautious.

Ericcourt debated within himself whether he should want Greville. If he could do without him it were better, but for Greville's own sake and to further avoid every chance of *ceclandre*, he decided he could do without him.

The next idea that came to his mind after that point was settled he could not quite account for at the time. Afterwards, he put it down to the sort of prophetic intuition that sometimes comes during a crisis, when the mind is in a highly-wrought state. Yet the idea was common-place enough—simply, that he should order a room at the Hotel for a week.

He went out, and himself sent a telegram to the proprietor to that effect, and, when the reply came, sat down and wrote to Walter Hilliard, without date, address or name, that he had taken this room, and could be heard of at the hotel, or any message left.

He had still his debt to pay to Venner; he had neither been to his chambers nor to the club since the debt was incurred. Hilliard's intimation, which he had been waiting for, determined him to release himself from his obligation—which had galled him, notwithstanding his deliberation in letting it run—and—if he could—pay another debt in another fashion. Meanwhile, he got through the days as usual—working till the evening, when he had generally some engagement to fulfil.

His popularity in society was by no means decreased by the rumours that had reached many a drawing-room that the painter added to his other attractions the delightful one of a little wickedness.

Somehow, Ericcourt did not care for this popularity even as much as he might have done a year ago.

Impossible as it was to spoil him, still he would have found it pleasant to have so many doors set wide for him to enter, so many kindly hands held out in welcome. Now he did not appreciate it.

It seemed to set him still further from Violet. She was shut out from a society to which he had the free *entrée*. He had taken a step above her—he who would have taken the lowest place so it had been at her side. He saw her but once during these few days; then he was grave and preoccupied, sitting by her, and watching the white fingers amongst the delicate lace she was working. Violet made one or two efforts to rouse him, rallied him, laughingly, on his silence—and laughter was very far from her that day—but she could not succeed. He only smiled and answered:

"One can't always wear a mask, Violet! It is such a relief to drop it for once."

Their future hung so dark before them. How did he know—how did either know, for Violet was quick to feel why he was in this unwonted mood—what a few hours might bring forth? What their position to each other would be? Honour might be gained at so dear a price!

Violet gave no hint of her knowledge as to his movements till he was going. He had held her in a clasp that said so plainly, "I will not let you go," that she had felt its meaning in every fibre of her being.

"Leigh," she said, nestling in his arms, "you remember your promise?"

"Yes, I remember it."

"And you will remember it when you are most tried—and keep it?"

Those eyes, with untold sweetness in them, subduing him, compelled him to obedience.

"Yes," he said again, quietly. His lips pressed hers once more; no further word passed between them.

(To be continued next week.)

HOW TO BE HAPPY

When you hear of good in people—tell it;
When you hear of evil—quell it.
Let the goodness have the light,
Put the evil out of sight,
Make the world we live in bright,
Like the heaven above.

You must have a work to do—pursue it.
If a failure, try again—renew it.
Failure spurs us to success,
Failures come, but come to bliss,
Fitting us for righteousness
In the heaven above.

A STEADY DEATH-RATE. — Lady Tourist:
"This must be a very healthy village. Now, what may the death-rate be?" Old Inhabitant:
"Wonderful steady, ma'am, wonderful steady. One death to each person—right along."

A RASH MARRIAGE.

(NOVELLETTE.)

(Concluded from page 203.)

know whether you will care to hear it, but I have loved you ever since you nursed me away in Africa, and the great hope of my life is to make you my wife. What do you say?"

At first she said nothing, but gazed at him in a sort of bewilderment, as if her brain were tardy in receiving the sense of his words; then her expression changed, and she drew a sharp breath that was almost a sob.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Do you mean what you say—really, really mean it?"

"I mean every word I say."

"You love me, and wish to make me your wife?"

"Yes."

"But"—she wavered a little, and drew back—"but I thought you were engaged to your cousin, Miss Seagrave?"

"No. I cared for her once with a boy's fond, foolish passion, and I asked her to marry me. She refused, and now the old love has died so completely that friendship reigns in its stead. You are the only woman I ever loved with the one strong passion of manhood. Do you hear, Monica?" he said, very tenderly, and, unrebuked; he drew her head on his shoulder and looked down into the love-lit eyes that were raised to his.

Helena thought of nothing—recked of nothing, save the one great joy that had so suddenly come to her. Past, future—all were merged in the ecstasy of the present; and as she felt Vane's arms steal round her, and his heart beating close to hers, she put up her arms and wreathed them round his neck.

"I love you!" she whispered. "For the first time since my childhood I am perfectly, utterly happy."

CHAPTER XII.

It was midnight, and Helena sat at her window in the little attic, dignified by the name of bedroom, and gazed out on the trees in the park with a smile, curiously compounded of joy and pain, on her lips.

She had left Vane without telling him a word of her story, and now she was wondering how she would break it to him and how he would receive it. Perhaps it would have been better to tell him the truth at once; but her heart, so long a stranger to happiness, cried out for these few hours of perfect bliss, and would not have them marred by a confession of her identity. She felt like a woman in a dream, and put off the awakening as long as she could.

But the possibility had to be faced; and as she sat there leaning out into the soft, wet night, she felt her heart sink like lead at the idea of Vane's astonishment and dismay when he learned who she really was. After the few moments of silence following on his declaration of love, he had given her a short sketch of his marriage and the terms in which he had spoken of his wife—the mingled pity and scorn had made a chill creep idly through her veins.

"Do you think, then, that you never would have grown to care for her, supposing you had been thrown together?" she had asked.

"Cared for her?" he repeated, in an accent of utter surprise. "Do you think it possible for me to care for a woman who so entirely forgot the attributes of her sex as to ask a man to marry her?"

"But she was sorely pressed!"

"That may be, and I was very sorry for her. Still, my compassion would, by no possibility, ever have turned to love; and the sole thing that made me accept her offer was her promise that she would never see me again. I tried hard to be sorry when I read in the papers the news of her death, but all my endeavours were vain, for my heart seemed incapable of any sensation save delight in my freedom and consequent ability to woo you!"

"But," Helena had persisted, "would

nothing make you forget that one mad act of hers?"

"Nothing. The one thing that I revere in your sex is modesty, and if a woman did not reach my standard in that particular I should never think of her as a wife, even if she had the beauty of Helen or Cleopatra. You, Monica, are my ideal of all that is pure and sweet, and in your dear hands I know both honour and happiness are secure."

The words she would have uttered died on her tongue. It was so hard to destroy the illusion, and confess that she had so far descended from her pedestal of girlish modesty as to ask a man to wed her. And yet she knew it must be done.

"Now tell me of yourself, sweet," Vane had said, fondly. "Remember, I know nothing of my love, except that she is a queen amongst women."

"I will tell you all to-morrow; let us talk of ourselves to-night," had been her reply, and he had willingly yielded, for lovers are all selfish, and their own affairs are usually quite sufficient to engross their attention.

Helena recalled every word, every look, every action of his as she sat in her lonely garret, but the only solution to her difficulty that presented itself was to go straight to him in the morning and make a full disclosure. Would his love survive the test of knowing her to be the woman whose name he uttered with a shudder of disgust. Would he understand the self-renunciations that had dictated her change of name, and the fraud she had practised for his sake, never suspecting that the love she had heard him confess to Molyneux had herself, instead of Christabel, for its object?

She did not know, and all through the night she tossed restlessly on her bed propounding the question, but unable to give an answer.

Meanwhile Vane, too excited to sleep, sat smoking in his chambers, and thinking of the girl he had won. In spite of his contact with the world, there was still a good deal of chivalry left in his nature, and this Helena awakened. All his romantic instincts, all the reverence which he had felt for woman in the abstract, had twined themselves about her, and he had spoken truly when he said she represented his ideal.

All the same, he would have been better pleased if he had known more about her antecedents, for it is hardly satisfactory to be entirely in the dark respecting your future wife's relations, however blindly you may be in love with her.

"She will tell me everything in the morning," he said to himself; and the next day, at the very earliest hour it is deemed permissible to call, he went to Park Lane, and at the door of his aunt's house came face to face with no less a person than Mr. William Compton, who, ornamented as he was with a very black eye, looked neither picturesque nor respectable.

He bestowed a surly look on Lord Seagrave, who was dressed in a rough riding suit, but passed without making a remark, and the latter went on into the house, and was ushered into the morning-room, where there was a big desk, while a footman went upstairs to inform Helena of his presence—for on his arrival he had boldly asked to see the young companion.

But, instead of Helena, Christabel came down, looking very lovely in a morning wrapper of cambric and lace, ornamented with knots of pale blue ribbon.

"I met James on the stairs," she said, "and he told me you wanted to see Miss Burn. I fancied he had made a mistake, and so I came down to ask you."

"It was no mistake," he returned. "Still, I am glad you came instead, as I shall be able to explain the situation. The fact is, I proposed to Miss Burn last night, and she accepted me."

He looked away from his cousin as he spoke, and so he did not see the gleam that flashed into her blue eyes, making them for the moment like steel. When she spoke there was a curiously hard, metallic ring in her voice.

"I am afraid you have made a great mistake, Vane, for I do not believe this girl is free to become your wife."

"Why not?"

"Because she is married already."

"What?" exclaimed Vane. "Take care what you say, Christabel. Remember she is my promised wife, and I shall resent an insult offered to her more than I should one to myself."

"Do you think me capable of telling a lie in order to gratify a personal spite?" she demanded, with some scorn. "What I have said I believe to be the truth, otherwise I should never have uttered it." There was a conviction in her voice that struck him with an uncomfortable chill. "And here, see, is a keeper the maid found in her room."

She took a paper from the desk, and gave him a chased ring. He took it from her, and then added, coldly:

"Who told you she was married?" he asked, commanding his voice by a great effort.

"The man with whom she has assignations, and who you met at the door a few minutes ago. Besides, my maid has seen a wedding-ring, which she always wears suspended round her neck, and if she were not married she would hardly do that."

"Your proofs are of the slenderest description, Christabel," said the soldier, with a forced laugh. "Nevertheless, such as they are they shall be contradicted, and by Miss Burn herself." He rang the bell, and when it was answered, asked that Miss Burn might be requested to come into the drawing-room immediately.

Christabel heard the order given in silence; but as soon as the footman disappeared she said:

"I really do not see what object you will gain by Miss Burn's presence, for of course she will deny the accusation of being married."

"Her denial will be quite sufficient," he responded, coldly. "My confidence in her word is such that I require no other proof."

She shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing; and a few minutes later the door opened, and Helena came in. She paused near the threshold, looking from one to the other, and her fingers twined themselves together in the nervous fashion peculiar to her when agitated or embarrassed.

"Monica!" said Vane, "Miss Seagrave is labouring under a grave mistake with regard to you, and I want you to correct it. She thinks you are married."

He stopped suddenly, for a low cry broke from the girl, and she shrank back as if a sudden pain had seized her. A faint smile curved Christabel's lips, but faded directly. She did not wish to show any exultation until her triumph was quite assured.

"If I am wrong I shall be very glad to confess it," she said, "but I am told, on what I believe to be good authority, that your name is not Monica Burn, and that instead of being a single girl you are a married woman, whose husband is still living!"

Helena made no reply, but put up her hands to hide her burning face. What could she say? How could she meet this charge? To deny it was impossible, seeing that it was true; but to confess it before Miss Seagrave seemed a humiliation too great to be borne.

"Speak, Monica!" entreated her lover, a strange pallor showing through the dusky bronze of his skin. "Say that there is some mistake, and that you are really Monica Burn—the woman who told me last night that mine was the first man's lips that had ever pressed hers since her childhood!"

Then she turned to him with her hands stretched out in appeal.

"Let me see you alone, and I will explain everything!"

Perhaps he would have yielded to the entreaty had he not glanced at Christabel, and seen a smile of undisguised mockery in her eyes. Somehow the sight stung him to the quick, and he received that the woman he

loved should be vindicated in his cousin's estimation as well as his own.

"I will speak with you alone, presently," he said, "but before leaving this room you must answer a question. Mind, I do not doubt you, but others who know less of you may do so, and therefore I must press you to clear up the mistake without delay. Are you married, and is the name you bear a false one? Say 'No,' and then I shall be quite satisfied."

"I cannot answer you now—only let me see you by yourself for five minutes!" she cried, piteously, clasping her hands together.

A change came over Lord Seagrave's face—the first shadow of mistrust; and she, quick to observe it, felt a chill agony of fear pierce her heart, for it made him look cold, and hard and stern, and while he was in that mood she knew she would never have courage to make her confession.

"I must insist on an answer," he said, drawing away from her. "It is a duty you owe me as my promised wife."

"Have you not had answer enough already?" exclaimed Christabel, unable to contain herself any longer. "Don't you see that my accusation is a true one, and so she dare not deny it?"

"Is this so, Monica?" he asked, sternly. "Are you indeed guilty of the charges brought against you?"

"Yes!" cried Helena, with the courage of desperation. "It is as true in the letter as it is false in the spirit."

He recoiled backwards, as if someone had struck him a blow.

"Do not let us stay to palter with sophistries," he said, bitterly. "If you confess that you are married I suppose we may take it for granted your husband is alive!"

She bowed her head. Surely, surely, Christabel would go away and leave them now.

Vane turned to his cousin. "You are right, and I am wrong. How you gained your knowledge I neither know nor care, but I confess myself a fool—outwitted by an artful woman who made me love, when I ought to have scorned her. Well, I suppose we must all purchase wisdom by experience, and if mine has come to me rather late in life I ought to be thankful I have been allowed to cherish my illusions so long. In future I will be more careful, and rest assured I shall never risk another such experience!"

And, so saying, he turned on his heel and left the house, deaf to Helena's piteous cry—

"Vane—Vane, come back to me—come back!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Poor Helena! Instead of her cry being answered by her husband, it was Christabel who spoke, in clear, cutting tones that hurt like a knife.

"After this scene, Miss Burns—I must call you so, as I do not know your proper name—you will, of course, understand the impossibility of remaining in my mother's house."

Helena rose to her feet, her face pale, but her expression well nigh as haughty as Miss Seagrave's own.

"I understand it perfectly, and I will leave to-day."

"I would also suggest," added Christabel, insolently, "that you should not see Lady Seagrave before your departure, as the news I shall have to tell her will necessarily be a shock, and the sight of you will only serve to intensify it."

Helena bowed her head, but made no further reply; and then, like one in a dream, she got up and went to her own room, where she packed her trunk, ready for departure.

Every knock at the door, every footstep on the stairs made her heart beat in thick, muffled throbs against her side, for might it not be Vane, whose love had brought him back to listen to her exculpation?

Her hopes were doomed to disappointment, for no one came to her, save Garvel with an

envelope containing the salary due to her, and directed in Christabel's handwriting.

If she had followed her first impulse she would have flung the gold into the grate, but second thoughts counselled prudence, and she remembered that she had little enough money as it was, and that it must keep her until she could get another situation.

Never in her whole life had she felt so miserably desolate, so thoroughly hopeless. She had nowhere to go, no friend in the world to advise her—no home, no shelter even.

After some thought she decided upon looking out for fresh lodgings, instead of going to those she had formerly occupied, where William Compton would assuredly seek her, and, accordingly, on leaving Park Lane, she drove to the north-west part of London, and found a couple of small rooms in a turning off Kentish Town Road. The rent was small, and this fact had a good deal to do in deciding her to take them.

All that night she was debating in her mind when and how she would see Lord Seagrave—for the idea that he had bidden her an eternal farewell was one she utterly refused to contemplate.

Surely he would come to her when his anger cooled, and listen to her explanation. She dare not seek him herself, for, after her one great infringement of womanly modesty, it behoved her to be more than careful of again transgressing its bounds; and he, of all men, was the least likely to be won through being eagerly sought.

She took care that he should have the means of finding her address, for directly she was settled in her lodgings she enclosed it to the footman who always answered the door at No. —, Park Lane, and who would be sure to be questioned by Lord Seagrave if he wished to discover her whereabouts.

But she neither saw nor heard from him. All that day, all the next day, she sat in her little dingy room, waiting for the knock at the door that never came, or for the letter which the postman never brought.

Wretched as had been some of her experiences in her early youth, they were as nothing compared with the misery of the present—this sickness of "hope deferred" which was the most terrible part of her trial.

On the third day her landlady—a kind, motherly sort of woman—came in, bringing with her the evening paper of the night before.

"I thought perhaps you might like to see the news, as you're sort of lonesome," she observed, standing in the doorway with her hands on her hips, "and the paper don't cost me nothink, for one of my young men lodgers brings it home from the City with him every evening, so I can always lend it to you the next morning."

Helena thanked her, and, as she disappeared, mechanically opened the pink-tinted sheet—for it was the *Globe*. She had little or no interest in the current topics of the day, and would probably have thrown the journal on one side immediately had not her eyes been caught by a familiar name—that of Lord Seagrave. The paragraph in which it appeared ran as follows:—

"We understand that Colonel Lord Seagrave, who left for the Continent this morning, intends joining the expedition for exploring the interior of Africa which starts from Berlin early next week."

The paper dropped from Helena's nerveless hands, and for a few minutes she sat as still and rigid as if she had been carved in marble, while her eyes were fixed in a glassy, unseeing stare on the opposite wall. Then full consciousness came to her, and a low cry broke involuntarily from her lips.

He had gone away and not made one effort to see her. His farewell had, indeed, been intended as eternal, and in all probability she would never see him again!

She covered her face with her hands, and wondered, in a dim sort of way, if other women suffered as much as she did, or whether Fate had singled her out from the rest as being

able to bear heavier sorrows. Then she rose and paced the room, for inaction seemed only to increase her suffering.

How could she look forward to the future—the long, lonely years that stretched themselves out in a grey vista of hopeless solitude, wherein she saw herself growing daily older, weaker, more miserable? She shuddered at the prospect.

"I must not think of it," she muttered to herself, "or I shall go mad. I must work hard and strive to forget. I will forget."

But it was easier to make the resolve than keep it. True; the very next day she went to the doctor who had attended William Compton and asked him if he could recommend her to another situation. But then followed weary weeks of waiting, during which she saw no one but her landlady, except, indeed, on one occasion, when she had to go into Oxford Street, and then she met Compton himself.

She would have passed him without speaking, but he was not to be shaken off so easily, and followed her perseveringly until she turned round and addressed him.

"What do you want with me?" she demanded. "I have no money to give you, so there is no object in your pursuing me."

"I want to know where you are staying?" he said, doggedly.

"Your curiosity will not be satisfied, then, for I choose to keep my whereabouts a secret from you."

"Ah!" he said, with malignant triumph, "you are afraid of me now. You have found out that my bite is even worse than my bark! Why weren't you wise enough to keep in with me, and stay at Park Lane, where you had such a good place?"

She walked on without replying.

"Come, Helena!" he continued, presently, in a different tone; "it won't do for you and me to keep bad friends. I'm sure I'm willing to do my best to help you, and, as a matter of fact, I have more than once regretted telling Miss Seagrave you were married; but I was so wild with you, and that fine gentleman of a soldier—curse him!—that I really didn't know what I was doing."

Helena came to a full stop and faced him.

"You told Miss Seagrave I was married!"

"Yes. She asked me the question, and I answered truthfully."

"What a novel position for you to be in!" she exclaimed, with a bitter, little laugh. "Did you also disclose the name of my husband?"

"No, she did not ask me that. The fact was her maid had seen you and me together, and overheard me saying something to you about being married and living under a false name; and when she saw me hanging round Park Lane waiting for you the morning after the fuss in the Park she called me in, and asked me if it was true. She wanted me to stay and accuse you yourself, but that I wouldn't do. There! Now I've made a clean breast of it, and you know everything about the matter. Tell me where you live, and let us be good friends again!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," returned the girl, steadily; "and if you don't at once desist from following me, I shall give you into custody on the charge of annoying me. I mean what I say, and if you are counting on my shrinking from the publicity of a police-court, you are quite mistaken in your estimate of my character."

He paused irresolutely, and she took advantage of this wavering to get into a hansom, and give directions to the driver in a low voice.

Mr. Compton could not follow, for the simple reason that he did not at that precise moment happen to possess a cab-fare, and so her ruse succeeded, and she got free from him.

About a week later she heard from Doctor Little that he had found a patient for her to nurse—a paralytic old woman of over eighty, who had no relatives and who wanted a nurse for a permanency.

Luckily Helena's appearance pleased her, and, after a good deal of fuss, which she thought necessary before engaging her, our heroine took up her abode with her in a great gloomy old house at Highgate—a house big enough and bare enough for a barracks.

And there she stayed all through the summer, the autumn, and winter time, leading a life of unvarying monotony, rarely going out-of-doors, and never seeing anyone in the house save its mistress and the two old servants. An existence more colourless it is impossible to imagine; and there were times when Helena doubted whether she could bear it any longer. Death itself seemed almost preferable to such a vegetation!

CHAPTER XIV.

Meanwhile Vane, wandering restlessly about from place to place, taking part in perilous enterprises, throwing himself eagerly into every adventurous project that came in his way, could not forget the girl he had loved, even though he believed she had deceived him as treacherously as woman ever deceived man.

The love he had given her was the truest, deepest, and best of which a strong nature is capable, and therefore it could not be uprooted without making every fibre in his heart bleed. Strive as he would against it, her image still haunted him; her eyes, lovely, lustrous, tender as when she had whispered her love vows in the Park, still looked into his with all their Circe magic, and Vane knew that though he lived far beyond the span of years allotted to man, those eyes would never lose their witchery.

After leaving Europe, he first of all went to Africa, but growing tired of that, resolved to make a short tour through the States of America, and accordingly found himself in New York, where a curious incident befell him. He met an old schoolfellow, who was now part owner of a line of steamers running between Liverpool and New York, of which the Gloriana had been one, and while talking to him of that ill-fated vessel Vane said—

"I suppose there was not a shadow of a doubt that all the passengers and crew perished?"

"No," answered the other; "but I discovered quite recently that a lady, whose name was down as having being one of the drowned crew, never, as a matter of fact, left Liverpool, although for some reason or another she did not choose to contradict the report of her death." He paused a moment, and looked at the officer rather curiously. "The strange part of the affair is that her name was the same as your own—Chisholm!"

"What?" exclaimed Vane, turning upon him with eager questioning. "How do you know that this is true?"

"Because the clerk in our London house told me. He said that the night before the Gloriana sailed a lady, who had given her name as 'Mrs. Chisholm,' came to him, saying that circumstances rendered it impossible for her to leave England for some time, and she, therefore, wished to find someone to take her berth. As the notice was so short this was impossible, but all the same the lady did not sail."

"You are sure of this?"

"Positive. For I made very particular inquiries in consequence of the name being the same as yours. I thought," he added, slyly, "she might be a friend—perhaps a relative of yours."

Lord Seagrave made no reply, but the communication had a very great effect on him, inasmuch as it convinced him that his wife was really alive, but that she had taken advantage of her supposed death in order to escape from the tie of a marriage that had become hateful to her.

As a matter of fact, Vane was not much surprised that it should be so. She had married him when she was too young to fully understand the importance of the step she was taking, and, in the meantime, she had probably met with some man who had won her heart, and thus given her greater cause to regret her youthful madness.

Vane, much as he despised her, felt even more sorry for her than for himself, and, indeed, her lot, from his point of view, was a terribly hard one.

"If I could only make atonement!" he said to himself, and then he fell to thinking, and finally roused himself and went to a law stationer, where he bought a dingily-bound, plethoric-looking volume, which he studied with great diligence—or, perhaps, it would be more correct to say, he studied one particular part of it, and that part treated of divorce.

"Yes," he said, thoughtfully, as he closed the book, "it can be done—say, more—it shall be done!"

That very day he booked his passage to Liverpool, and a fortnight afterwards he was back in London, where his first visit was paid to a private inquiry office. His object was to learn the whereabouts of Helena, and in order to do this he gave the details of his marriage, and also of his wife's reported death.

"I have reason to believe that the report was not a true one," he said, "and as I am anxious to be satisfied on this point I have come to you to clear up the matter, and—if Lady Seagrave is in England—to discover her whereabouts."

The detective, whose name was Goddard, bowed.

"I have no doubt I shall be able to satisfy your doubts, my lord," he answered, "as I know the lady's maiden name, and the county in which her father's property was situated. She ought to be easily traced."

The task was not quite so easy as he imagined. He found out that Helena had lost most of her money, and had come to London with Mrs. Travers, but there the traces were lost, and his investigation came to a full stop. His next step was to advertise, and accordingly the following appeared in the "agony" column of the *Times*, and most of the other morning papers.

"Helena Chisholm, née Markham. If this lady will communicate with the undermentioned office she will hear of something to her advantage; or if any person, knowing her whereabouts, will do so, he will be handsomely rewarded."

Then was added the name of the firm.

The advertisement brought a response the next morning in the person of Mr. William Compton, whose watery eyes and shaking limbs testified to the kind of life he had lately been leading. He was shabbier, and more out of elbows than ever: his hat was shiny, his garments were threadbare, and from the very suspicious manner in which his coat was buttoned up to the throat, it was more than doubtful whether the luxury of a shirt was not one which necessity had forced him to discontinue.

Before committing himself by any statement he inquired what the reward was to be.

"If you can give me information as to where the lady is at the present moment I will pay you the sum of twenty pounds," was the detective's reply.

"That's not enough!" returned Compton, promptly. "I know a good deal about the

matter, and I want fifty pounds to make me tell it."

The detective knew his man, and so a compromise was finally effected by which Compton was to be paid thirty pounds if his information led to any results. He thereupon disclosed the ruse Helena had resolved upon when she saw her name in the list of those lost in the Gloriana, and told how she had taken a situation with Lady Seagrave, and had afterwards gone to another at Highgate.

"I found out her present address as cleverly as if I had been a detective myself," Compton said, with a sly wink. "I thought she would probably get into another place through the doctor who attended me in an illness, so I went to him and asked him where she was, and he told me at once."

Goddard gave him nothing until he had been to Highgate and ascertained for himself that the information was correct—an easy enough thing to do; for when he called at the house indicated, and inquired whether Miss Burn lived there, he was answered by the servant in the affirmative, and further informed that she had gone out shopping for her patient, but would be home in an hour's time.

The detective considered for a few moments, then scribbled a hasty note, asking her to come to his office at eleven o'clock the next day—for, he argued, that when she saw that her ruse had failed, and that it was known she was alive, she would have no motive for keeping out of the way.

He had not seen Lord Seagrave since his interview with Compton—in fact, Vane had gone to stay for a week with a friend near Newmarket, but had desired to be communicated with if anything of importance transpired. Goddard, who rarely committed himself to writing, sent him a telegram requesting his presence at the office before twelve the next morning, and then felt that his promised reward would now be speedily in his pocket. His anticipations that Helena would come were fulfilled, for punctually at the time appointed she appeared, dressed in a long black cloak which effectually disguised her figure, and a thick veil that entirely concealed her face.

"Have I the honour of speaking to Lady Seagrave?" asked the detective, suavely, as she was ushered into his private room.

She did not immediately reply, but gave a great start of emotion. It was the first time she had ever been addressed by that name, and every nerve in her body thrilled as she heard it. When she could command her voice she said,—

"I am the Monica Burn I believe you were inquiring for at Highgate yesterday. I wish to know for what purpose you desired my presence here this morning."

She was trembling in spite of her self-command. Now, for the first time, some faint idea struck her that her husband might be the instigator of the inquiries that were being made concerning her, and she deeply regretted the curiosity that had led her to this place. She half rose, as if she intended retreating, but Goddard was too quick for her, and went to the door himself.

At the same moment there came the sound of a man's voice outside, and on hearing it the detective left the room.

It was, as he had suspected, Lord Seagrave.

"What was the meaning of your telegram?" demanded Vane, dispensing with any form of greeting.

Goddard pointed to the apartment he had just quitted.

"Go in there, my lord, and you will find your wife awaiting you."

A strange, strangled sort of cry broke from Helena's lips as she beheld her husband, and she half rose in her excitement, but recoiled herself immediately. Her back was to the light, so he could only see the cloaked outline of her form, and the thick veil covering her

SKIN OF LILY-LIKE BEAUTY



secured by using "Coral Balm," the most perfect complexion beautifier imaginable. Renders the skin delightfully soft and clear, and endows it with peach-like bloom and liveliness. To convince you that this is true, we make this MARVELLOUS OFFER for a limited period. Send us for a case of the "Coral Balm," and we will send with it, as an absolutely FREE GIFT, a complete Fine-Pong set. We are doing this simply to induce you to try "Coral Balm," because, after having once tried it, its merits will compel you to continue its use.

REDWINTER'S "CORAL BALM," Dept. B, 9, Great Queen St., London.

PING-PONG Set Complete Sent Free.

face, thus no suspicion of her identity with his former nurse occurred to him.

Her exclamation he regarded as perfectly natural, and entirely explained by the agitation the sight of him, after so many years, would assuredly occasion.

"I see you recognise me," he observed, with a grave bow, as he leaned his hand on the back of a chair opposite to hers, "and I am afraid this interview cannot be otherwise than painful to you. The fact is, that after your reported death, I learned you had never sailed in the *Gloriana*, and therefore came to the conclusion that you must be still living, but that you wished to sever the tie between us, and therefore allowed the report to pass uncontradicted. Was my surmise correct?"

He paused, and she, not daring to open her lips, made a slight movement of the head, which he interpreted as an assent to his words.

"Since then," he continued, "I have been thinking very seriously of our mutual positions, and I have now to suggest a method by which they may be rendered less painful than they are at present. I find that the law will help us, for if you apply for a divorce on the ground of desertion—and the fact of my not having lived with you since our marriage will be proof enough of the charge—you will be entitled to obtain a decree. I need hardly say that I shall make no opposition—indeed, I shall rejoice very sincerely when our ill-omened marriage is set aside. It was a cruel act on my part to take advantage of your momentary indiscretion," he added, after a slight pause, "and all the atonement in my power I am more than willing to make. As to the fortune I had when I married you"—he spoke hurriedly now, as if the words hurt him—"I will restore every farthing, for I am now a rich man and in a position to give you back that which it is my shame to have taken."

Not a word from the black-robed figure, sitting motionless with her back to the window!

Helena seemed to herself as if she were suddenly turned to stone, and incapable of either speech or action. In her wildest dreams it had never occurred to her that she would meet Vane here this morning; for she had imagined that an ocean separated them, and had come full of anxiety to know who it was that had surprised her secret. The sight of him—the sound of his voice—completely unnerved her, and it was only by the strongest mental effort she kept her self-control. She felt as if in a few moments she might become hysterical—might cry out and betray herself, and all the time she was speaking his words sounded dim and far off, and their sense only reached her brain in a bewildered sort of way.

"What do you say to my plan?" went on Vane, looking at her with some curiosity, and wishing she would raise her veil for a moment. Still no reply.

"May I take it for granted that you assent?" he added.

She bowed affirmatively, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Then I may also take it for granted that you acknowledge yourself to be my—wife?" he was going to say, but substituted instead—"the lady I married eight years ago?"

Again she bowed. Denial was clearly useless since her ruse had failed in its effect, and indeed she thought less of that than of getting away from the office without his recognising her. She dared not speak for fear her voice should betray her, but she felt that the time might come when she would be compelled to break the silence.

"I suppose the rest of the matter may be left to the management of our respective solicitors," observed Vane, after an awkward pause. "Yes," indistinctly from behind her veil.

"Is there anything I can do to help you? If so, I beg you to command my services, for I should be most happy in being able to save you any trouble or annoyance."

She made a hasty movement of negation, and he half sighed. It was clear she mistrusted

him. Of course it was natural that it should be so, but somehow the idea hurt him.

"Very well; then I suppose our interview is at an end. If you should ever want me—I mean if I can do anything for you, a note to my club will always bring me to you. Good-morning."

She bowed without rising; and he took up his hat and gloves and turned away. What a mockery life was! Husband and wife parting thus like two strangers.

He was just closing the door when the sound of a heavy fall made him turn round, and there he saw his wife lying on the floor, apparently in a dead faint.

It was not the first time he had had to restore a fainting woman to consciousness, and he snatched up a carafe of water that stood on a side table, then lifted her in his arms and threw back the veil from her face—pale and cold as if carved out of marble.

He uttered a cry as his eyes fell on her features, and that cry seemed to penetrate Helena's frozen consciousness, for a faint tinge of colour drifted into her cheeks, and her long-lashed lids trembled. Then her eyes opened and met his, and she disengaged herself from his arms, while a quick shiver ran through her limbs.

"You!" he exclaimed, in a low tone, in which surprise, love, repugnance, and bewilderment were curiously blended.

She did not say a word, but stood opposite him with downcast eyes and trembling lips, holding the back of a chair for support.

"What is the meaning of this farce?" he went on sternly a few minutes later. "For what purpose have you sought me?"

"I have not sought you!" she exclaimed, passionately. "When I came I had no idea of seeing you—if I had thought you would be here, believe me I would never have come!"

"Then what brought you here?"

"The fact of my having been advertised for; and Goddard's coming to Highgate to seek me."

"To seek you! He went to seek my wife—for I have reason to suppose she is still alive." Vane came to a full-stop, for an expression appeared on Helena's face whose meaning he could not understand. "There is some mystery here—what is it?" he said, slowly.

"The mystery is that I am Helena Markham—the woman you married," she exclaimed, desperately, resolved that the truth so long hidden, should at length be known. And then, as he stared at her in stupefied silence, she continued, "Now you know the reason why I could not deny your accusation of being married, and having a husband alive. I intended telling you everything if only you would have given me the opportunity—if you had not been so ready to judge me harshly, but I was afraid to do so afterwards—"

She did not complete the sentence, for Vane sprang forward and took her hands in his.

"I understand everything now, Monica," he said, calling her by the old familiar name. "Will you forgive me for my unbelief, and let the love of a life atone?"

She said nothing, but her eyes spoke for her; and Vane, as he gathered her in his arms, felt that at last happiness had come to him!

Lord Seagrave has sold out of his regiment, and now lives at his ancestral home—a grand old hall in the Midlands, of which Helena makes a fair and gracious mistress. The Dowager Lady Seagrave comes there sometimes, but Christabel never accompanies her, for she cannot forgive her cousin's wife for taking the place she hoped would be hers, and as the years go on, and her beauty fades, her enmity grows bitterer.

There is no cloud on the brightness of our heroine's life now, and the happiness of the present more than redeems the bitterness of the past; so after all, she can hardly be said to have made A RASH MARRIAGE!

[THE END.]

Free Coronation Music.

The finest musical composition of the year is a Coronation March by Mr. J. Michael Watson. The name Michael Watson will be known generally as composer of such famous songs as "Anchored," "The Forge," "The Merry Miller," etc. From its very nature the Coronation March was bound to get a firm hold upon the public taste, and seeing this, with characteristic foresight, the Bile Bean Co. at considerable expense acquired all publication rights. They have now had the march specially produced, and inform us that they are willing to send a copy as a coronation gift to any of our readers who would like one. The conditions on which we are able to make this offer are that each person desiring a copy shall send full name and address and penny stamp (to pay return postage) to the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co.'s Central Distributing Depot, Greek Street, Leeds (Yorks). As the march if bought is priced at 4s., this is an opportunity not to be missed. Be sure to mention this paper.

SWEET AND FAIR

Whatever could he have seen in her?

She isn't the least bit pretty;

She isn't stylish, she isn't rich,

She is neither wise nor witty.

Whatever could he have seen in her?

She is only a farmer's daughter;

Yet you would have thought her a princess

From the letters that he wrote her.

Whatever could he have seen in her?

A plain, little, homespun creature,

Without a single accomplishment,

And scarcely a decent feature.

Whatever could he have seen in her?

Something far better than beauty;

An innocent soul, a loving heart,

And a life all set to duty.

He saw a woman whose pleasure lay

In the peace of her household ways;

Who was happy to win her father's smile,

And proud of her mother's praise.

The best little sister in all the world;

As helpful in deed as in word;

As cheerful and gay as the sunshine;

As busy and bright as a bird.

So he passed by the belles of the season,

The maidens both stylish and pretty;

He passed by the highly accomplished,

The clever, the wise, and the witty.

And chose for the wife of his heart

The dear little homespun creature;

Whose worth was far better than gold

Than beauty of form or of feature.

Whatever the world may see in her

Is beyond his worry or care;

To him she is rich and good and true,

To him she is sweet and fair.

All Women! Girls!

who value their complexion, and who like to keep it fresh, clear, and beautiful, should use PERMOLINE SOAP. It keeps the most delicate skin free from pimples, roughness, blackheads, and eruptions, and you should give it a trial. Mothers should wash babies with it as it is most beneficial. Permoline Soap is supplied by chemists at One Shilling per Tablet, or sample will be sent post free for 1d., by

Cherub Soap Co., Ltd., Bootle.

Gleanings

Two heads are not better than one if the baby buggy is not built for twins.

SOME people poke up hornets' nests just for the sake of being insulted.

LOVE is like an onion:
We taste it with delight,
And when it's gone we wonder
Whatever made us bite.

CANDLES, hitherto used in lighting the Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris, are to make way for electricity at the cost of about \$20,000.

A PARISIAN dentist has at length discovered a substitute for cocaine and other still more obnoxious anesthetics in the employment of a high frequency electric current. A non-conducting covering of gutta-percha, lined, however, with gold leaf, is put over the tooth, complete insensibility is produced, and the most refractory molar can be extracted without pain.

IS ACETYLENE DANGEROUS?—A writer in the "Hardware Trade Journal" protests against the assumption that acetylene is dangerous. He declares that although there were a few accidents with the gas in the experimental stages, there has never been a single one in the ordinary use of it which will in any way compare with the terrible disasters that attend the use of petroleum. Twenty-six fatal accidents from its use occurred in the county of London alone during last year. Many of the accidents were, of course, due to gross carelessness and ignorance.

BEWARE OF THE DESPISER OF MONEY.—Who among us does not crave the competency which shall lift us above sordid care, and what are we spending our strength for? Is it not that we and those we love may have ease when ease is sweet? Beware of the man or woman who despises money or what it can bring. He is insincere. The only mischief is when it lays hold of the human soul, when the mere acquiring of it becomes the main object of life. Then it is time to take heed; the soul is in jeopardy. There can be nothing more terrible than to be old and friendless and without resource in this sad world, to be an apparently useless burden for whom there is no room.

THE KING'S APOLOGY.—At the present moment there is an inmate of the Salisbury Workhouse who has had the peculiar honour of receiving an apology from the King. His name is Evans, and a series of misfortunes is responsible for his present position. In 1882 he was at work in Portsmouth, and on Easter Sunday he was a spectator of a church parade that was held on Governor's Green. The King (then Prince of Wales), who was in the neighbourhood in connection with the Volunteer manoeuvres, was present at the parade, and in passing on to the ground accidentally collided with Evans. With a courtesy that becomes "the first gentleman of Europe" he promptly turned and apologised. Evans' friends reminded him that it was not everybody whose pardon had been begged by a future king.

THE ARTIFICIAL PRODUCTION OF RAIN.—A number of prominent Japanese scientists are at present engaged upon a series of experiments for the artificial production of rain by means of electricity. The first trial was made in the Fukushima prefecture, and the results obtained were very satisfactory. Operations were commenced at eleven in the evening, but no change was noticed until nine the next morning, when clouds began to gather in the vicinity of the place where the experiments were being held. Rain soon began to fall over an area of several miles in extent, and continued without intermission for twelve hours. It is, of course, impossible to draw conclusive evidence from the results of the first trial, but there seems to be more probability of success being attained by this means than by the system of detonating explosives.

THE law is the only thing on earth that is always able to take its time.

ADVICE is cheap, and it is generally appreciated in accordance with what it costs.

THE wife of the man with a strong will regards it as a clear case of stubbornness.

ANY OLD TITLES FOR SALE?—A writer in a Parisian newspaper says my wife has been told there are several American ladies living abroad who have secured titles in Italy within the past few years. Personally, I do not care a fig about such nonsense, but wishing to gratify her ambition, desire to be put in the way of purchasing one, if the price is not too exorbitant. I am particularly anxious to know what it will cost for her to become a Marquise or even a Countess.

A DOUBLE SIGN-BOARD.—Many persons know the little public-house at Land's End, the sign-board of which bears on one side "The Last Inn in England," and on the other "The First Inn in England," but it may not be so generally known that at Witcombe, near Gloucester, there is an inn at the bottom of a hill which also has a double sign-board, with these two inscriptions:—

"Before the hill you do go up—
Step in and have a cheering cup."

And on the reverse side:—

"You're down the hill, all danger past,
Come in and drink a friendly glass."

A PUBLICAN'S LOCK-OUT.—There are those who would hardly regard a strike, or rather a lock-out, amongst the publicans as an unmixed evil. This novel departure in commercial warfare was, according to the British Consul at Calais, actually threatened at one of the colliery towns in the north of France last year. Three hundred keepers of "cabarets" or public-houses met at the Marie to protest against a prefectorial decree limiting their hours of opening and closing, and declared that if they did not receive satisfaction within three days they would close their establishments. The authorities simply allowed the protest to pass unnoticed, practically telling the publicans to please themselves on the matter, and—the public-houses are still open.

"THE ORIGINAL GRAY JACKASS."—Scattered throughout England are some curious inn-names, and most curious perhaps is the sign of a roadside inn near Waterloo. Before the great battle which put an end to the career of Napoleon I. this cabaret displayed a sign of a donkey, described as the "Gray Jackass." After the downfall of the Empire, the owner, as a compliment to the victor, changed his sign to the "Duke of Wellington," to his own discomfiture. A rival "cabaretier" took advantage of the change to set up the "Gray Jackass," whereby he took away the business from the "Duke of Wellington." The result was the substitution of the title, "This is the original 'Gray Jackass,'" for the inscription beneath the Duke of Wellington's portrait. So says tradition.

WIRELESS TELEPHONY.—While Mr. Marconi is busy arranging for his trans-Atlantic wireless telegraphy on a commercial scale, many other inventors are endeavouring to perfect a system of wireless telephony capable of practical application. Messrs. Orling and Armstrong recently exhibited their system of wireless telephony by means of earth conduction or leakage. A Hungarian telegraph official is the inventor of another method which has recently been tested in the Adriatic Sea. The inventor declares that he can talk between two stations up to a distance of twenty kilometres, and that the installation will only cost £15. Again, a Philadelphia professor has been transmitting speech without wires across the Delaware river, a distance of a mile, by means of a method of earth telephony. Wireless telephony would, of course, have many advantages over wireless telegraphy in naval operations and in signalling from ship to shore, but the "tuning" difficulty will have to be surmounted.

A Vigorous and

Pathetic Story

A Serial Story by one of the most popular authors of the day will begin in THE LONDON READER next week,

ENTITLED

Eden's Sacrifice

It is a well constructed love story, founded on an ingeniously planned plot. The hero, a man of irreproachable character, is deceived in his youth by the

INFERNAL ARTIFICES OF A WOMAN

he believed he loved, and, like an honourable man, married. All too soon he discovers her baseness and treachery.

This adventuress reappears after a lapse of time. The hero has become the husband of the girl he

LOVES WITH A WHOLE-SOULLED DEVOTION,

and with an ardour and intensity that is given to man to love but once in his life.

Our readers are referred to the opening chapters of this vigorous and pathetic story which begins in the Next Number of the LONDON READER. We can promise them they will not be disappointed.

Facetiæ

"Did you ever see the prisoner at the bar?"
"Oh, yes; that's where I got acquainted with him."

DR. WINKERS: "I hear your friend was shot in the lumbar regions." "No; he was shot in the coal regions."

AUNT MARIA: "What! crying so early. Tommy? Have you been whipped already this morning?" Tommy: "No'm; I just got up."

They were talking about the Atlantic cable. "It reminds me of a good egg," he said. "A good egg?" "Why, yes—being so successfully laid."

He: "And now, dear, since we are safe in the train, why do you seem so sad?" She (pettishly): "We were not even chased. I don't think it was one bit romantic."

JONES: "It seems incredible, but my cook gets up every morning without being waked up." Smith: "What's the cause of it?" "The Milkman. She is in love with him."

MISS ANCIENTMAID (to Rusticboy): "Yes, dear, I return to the city to-morrow. Alas! we must indeed part! But why do you weep?" Rusticboy: "I am sympathising with the city fellows."

JACK: "Charley, why don't you propose to the Widow Green's daughter? She's rich, and is regarded as the pearl of her sex." Charley: "I know it, my boy, but I dislike the mother of pearl."

FIRST DAME: "Do you ever go through your husband's pockets in the morning?"—Second Dame: "Huh! Catch me waiting until morning. I go through them before he goes out in the evening."

A WRITER says that "only a woman understands the higher use of flowers." The writer aforesaid has evidently had his view of the stage obstructed by a female hat garnished with a bouquet a foot high.

In a good speech there are two important things. One is the beginning, and the other is the end. The nearer the beginning is to the end, as a general thing, the better and more satisfactory the speech.

MADAMOISELLE BATCHELOR: "Why do they call them fancy balls, Harry?" Brother Harry: "I can't imagine, unless it's because the fellows can talk and dance with any strange girls they fancy." "Take me to this one, Harry."

ELEVATOR BOY: "I remember you from the time you were here before, Miss." Miss Walk-up: "Why, how is that? I was at this hotel only a week." Elevator Boy: "Yes, miss; but I remember you 'cause you didn't remember me when you left."

WHEN the teacher of a grammar class asked: "What is a kiss?" a young lady candidate for graduation honours replied: "It is what a young man gives you when he says good-night at the front door." The teacher blushed and said that wasn't the right answer.

SMITH: "I think Miss De Blank is very rude." Jones: "What causes you to think that? I never thought her so." Smith: "I met her down town this afternoon, and asked her if I might see her home. She said yes, I could see it from the top of the high school building, and that it wasn't necessary to go any further."

YOUNG MAN (somewhat agitated): "I have called Mr. Means, to ask permission to pay my addresses to your daughter, Miss Ruth." Banker Means: "My daughter Ruth, Mr. Peduncle? Why, she is engaged to Mr. Frackhammer." Young Man (still agitated, but reflecting that all is not yet lost): "Did you think I said Miss Ruth, Mr. Means? I said Miss Gwendolen. The—er—similarity of the names probably caused you to misunderstand me."

"Mr. MCCLINTOCK," shouted his better half, "I want you to take your feet off the parlour table." "Mrs. MCCLINTOCK," he said, in a fixed, determined voice, "I allow only one person to talk to me that way." "And who is that?" she demanded. "You, my dear," he replied, softly, as he removed his pedes.

JONES: "There are only two periods in a man's life when he is greatly interested in his personal appearance." Smith: "When do they occur?" Jones: "One is at twenty, when he watches the hair coming out of his upper lip, and the other is at forty, when he watches the hair coming out on the top of his head."

HE (a travelling man): "I have but five minutes. Say, will you be my wife? I must catch that train." She never utters a word. He: "Only three minutes left; say the word, my darling."—She silent as the grave. He: "One minute left! Promise to be my wife!" She: "I promise." He: "I'll take the next train."

THE correspondent who wants to know "how to cook cabbage without having an odour in the house," is informed in the absence of the expert who conducts our household department, that another good way is to boil the cabbage in the middle of a ten acre lot, and keep the doors and windows of the house tightly closed while it is cooking.

MR. NICEFELLOW (to adored one's little brother): "There! You did that errand very nicely. Here's a penny for you." Little Brother: "Oh, ma! Mr. Nicefellow gave me a penny." Ma: "Well, my dear, you should say—." Little Brother: "Yes, I know I should say 'thank you,' but I was so surprised I forgot. You said he hadn't a cent."

"THOMPSON, you're a very mean man." "Thank you, Dolliver. How so?" "I asked you to lend me an umbrella during the rain yesterday." "I remember." "And you said your umbrella was used up." "Well?" "To-day I saw you with an elegant umbrella." "What of it?" "You said it was used up." "So it is. I always use it up. Don't suppose I'd use it down do you?"

MRS. MUSHROOM: "Them's very pretty dishes you've got, Mrs. Lineage." Mrs. Lineage: "Yes, those are some specimens of our family china. They have been in our family for generations. You see, each piece bears our family crest." "That's pretty fine, ain't it? But wait till you see the family china I've ordered. I'm going to have a different family crest on each plate."

ONE day Professor W—, examining the mental philosophy class, said: "Ah, young gentlemen, I have an impression! Now, young gentlemen," continued the doctor, as he touched his head with his forefinger, "can you tell me what an impression is?" No answer. "What? No one knows?" exclaimed the doctor, looking up and down the class. "I know," said a certain brilliant youth. "An impression is a dent in a soft place."

A SUNDAY-SCHOOL teacher, on a recent occasion, told her pupils that when they put their pennies in the contribution box she wanted each one to repeat an appropriate Bible verse. The first boy dropped in a penny, saying: "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." The next boy dropped his money into the box, saying: "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord." The third and youngest dropped his penny, saying: "A fool and his money are soon parted."

TRAMP (with an old school-book): "Say, mister, will yer kindly tell me what letter this is?" Pedestrian: "Certainly. That's L. Can't you read?" "No, sir; but I'm tryin' to learn, an' I shan't rest till I do, nuther." "I am delighted to find so laudable an ambition in one of your class. You have taken the right course at last." "Yes, sir. It's mighty rough on a traveller like me not ter be able to tell whether a sign says 'Beware o' the Dog' or 'Free Lunch Opening.'"

A Cheeky Imposition.

A local lady had what she described as "a cheeky imposition" played upon her the other day by an unscrupulous storekeeper. She had asked for a box of Bile Beans and had paid for them, when she discovered that they were not the real original Chas. Ford's Bile Beans but some inferior preparation. Our informant describes what followed:—

"Do you call yourself an honest man?" she asked, thumping the box on the counter. The shopman looked amazed and tried to look hurt. "You asked for a box of Bile Beans, madam, and you have got it. You—"

"I have done nothing of the kind!" she went on in a still higher key, "I call it a cheeky imposition! You know that there is only one real genuine Bile Beans, but because I didn't happen to say Chas. Ford's Bile Beans you trot out this rubbish!"

"You will find those Beans just as good as—"

"Hear the man!" shouted the now irate purchaser "Just as good! Chas. Ford's Bile Beans brought me from a bed of sickness and put me on my feet again, and you palm off this musty old unsaleable stuff and say it is just as good as the real Bile Beans! You'll tell me that black is really the same as white next! Give me Chas. Ford's Bile Beans or my money back." Thereupon the storekeeper, looking very red and uncomfortable, produced a box of Chas. Ford's Bile Beans. Picking it up, the lady walked to the door and then remarked, "Look you here Mr. Storekeeper, you've lost four good customers by this bit of trickery. I shall never come into your shop again, and I can promise that at least three others to whom I shall tell what has occurred will buy elsewhere from to-day. Good afternoon!"

The above incident forcibly illustrates the need of the warnings issued by the Bile Bean Co. of 119, London Wall, E.C., that purchasers of Bile Beans shall see the name Chas. Ford on every box and refuse all without it. A box will be sent post free from headquarters upon receipt of prices one and three-half-pence or two and nine.

UNNECESSARY INFORMATION.

If we spent the time improving the present we do in regretting the past, the future would not steal upon us unawares.

He that blows in the dust fills his own eyes.

If we were as disagreeable to our friends as we consider ourselves privileged to be to our family, how few we should have.

I have noticed among unbelievers that he who forfeits heaven is the first to deny its existence.

Misfortune is friendship's touchstone.

Mirth at a friend's or virtue's expense is too dear a purchase.

We never regret having refrained from saying an unkind thing or repeat having done a good action.

Light comes cry aloud; great ones are dumb.

Our love for humanity in general is truly remarkable, inasmuch as our neighbour's faults trouble us more than our own.

Let the unworthy and ungrateful fall from out thy life as dust from the chariot wheels. Pass on to thy destiny unconcerned.

He who sows brambles had better not go barefoot.

Around the axle of thy highest aim compel the wheel of circumstances to revolve.

Knowledge is a dagger in the hands of the wicked, and a blessing in the hands of the upright.

Eat with your friends and drink with them, but neither buy nor sell with them.

A fool carries his heart in his mouth, a glutton in his stomach, but the heart of a wise man is in the breast of a good woman.

Teach mankind and he will empty your pockets. Ridicule him and amuse him and he will fill them with gold.

Society

THE King has placed a beautiful stained-glass window in the private chapel at Windsor Castle, as a memorial to Her late Majesty Queen Victoria. The window consists of ten lights in two tiers, above the altar. In the lower tier is depicted the Crucifixion, and in the upper the Resurrection. A tablet has been affixed to the oak panel work near the window, recording the memorial as follows: "To the glory of God, and in pious memory of Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, born at Kensington Palace, May 24th, 1819, succeeded June 20th, 1837, died at Osborne, January 22nd, 1901, the window above the altar is dedicated by her devoted and sorrowing son, Edward, R.I."

INDEPENDENT of the grand review at Aldershot on June 16, at which both the King and Queen will be present, His Majesty proposes to visit one or two of the military centres in Kent and Essex next month.

THE King has learned with much satisfaction of the Lord Mayor's proposal to summon a meeting of the citizens of London to collect funds for the "King Edward VII. London Hospitals Fund," with especial reference to the movement of presenting a Coronation gift to His Majesty. He has signified his decision "that among the many schemes which have been suggested for emphasising in a useful and benevolent form the great ceremonial of the Coronation, none appeals more deeply to His Majesty than that for augmenting the Hospital Fund which was instituted by him when Prince of Wales in 1897," in commemoration of the late Queen's Diamond Jubilee. A meeting is to be called by the Lord Mayor on June 9 to take practical steps to give effect to this wish.

MAY 18 was the birthday of two important personages—the Czar, who was thirty-four; and the eldest son of the eldest son of the venerable Regent and Heir of Bavaria, who was a year younger. Of the Czar (who is first cousin of the Prince of Wales, as is also his wife) we need say nothing. Of Prince Rupert of Bavaria it is worth while to mention that he is the eldest son of the lady whom the wild members of the White Rose League style Queen of England, and is, therefore, himself Prince of Wales. His Bavarian Royal Highness showed his sense of the title granted him by the founders of the dead "Whirlwind" by figuring as representative of Bavaria in the last Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

On the night of the Coronation, and on the night after, two crowns of flame will dominate the region of Westminster from the eminence of the great tower of the new Roman Catholic cathedral. The last bricks will be in position by then; and the completion of the outer fabric of the great fane will indirectly be celebrated by the two circles of light lifted on its topmost pinnacle in honour of the crowning of the King and Queen. The idea is that of the Duke of Norfolk, who is president of the Catholic Union, and who will have as his guest during Coronation week the envoy of Pope Leo XIII.

LEOMINSTER'S OLD DUCKING-STOOL.—In the old Priory Church of Leominster is a very interesting specimen of the old cucking or ducking-stool, a universal mode of punishment formerly in vogue for the punishment of scolds, scandalmongers, and women with too long a tongue. It was also inflicted on brewers and bakers, etc., transgressing the law, who in such a stool were immersed over head and ears in (stercore) stinking water. This mode of punishment dates back to Saxon times, and the Leominster specimen was the last used in England of which we have any record, in 1809. Several other specimens still exist about the country, as at Montgomery, Warwick, Fordwich, and Leek.

Gems

A cruel story runs on wheels, and every hand oils the wheels as they run.

MEN may be born with fortunes ready-made, but character they have to achieve.

TELL the truth and let others say what they will. You are responsible for but one tongue.

THE person who spends his time in hunting down lies will have no leisure for the pursuit of truth.

No man ever lost his soul unless he lost it by the wound he gave another by inflicting some other agony.

THE heart is always hungry. No man lives happily alone. The wisest and the best is wiser and better for the friends he has.

THE frank confession of a fault emphasises to ourselves the necessity of overcoming it, and exerts a strong force in that direction.

STILL fight resolutely on, knowing that in this spiritual combat none is overcome but him who ceases to struggle and to trust in God.

PATIENCE and strength are what we need: an earnest use of what we have now, and all the time an earnest discontent until we come to what we ought to be.

HABIT is a mighty force, and must either tend toward that which is good or that which is evil. It rests with us whether it shall be one of our best friends or one of our worst enemies.

OUT OF DATE.—Enamoured Swain: "For you, darling, 'I wad lay me doon and dee.'" Practical Maiden: "That sort of thing is clear out of date, Willie. What a girl wants nowadays is a man who is willing to get up and hustle for her."

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

SISTER DORA.—There is nothing so bad as darkness in a sick-room, nor anything more health-restoring than sunlight. If the patient's eyes are weak, they can be protected by a screen, but the room should be flooded with the cheering, purifying, healing rays of the sun.

HOPELESS.—The only thing for you to do is to find someone who knows the lady and get an introduction to her. That is if you cannot forget her, which would be the easiest and safest way out of the dilemma. There is an old ditty which says, "Love will find a way." Perhaps a way will suggest itself to you sometime if you cannot take the advice I offer.

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AMTHERA.—Not knowing the gentleman, I cannot possibly say what his sentiments may be. Kissing is not always a sign of affection. Probably you will find out for yourself before long whether he is really attached to you or not.

DOR.—The lady about whom you all gossiped so freely was certainly indiscreet to provoke her neighbours into such a discussion of her conduct. If your description of her behaviour is strictly correct, she is pursuing a dangerous course.

MAKE.—The bride carries a bouquet even if she is married in her travelling dress. It is made of white flowers, and is the gift of the bridegroom. The bride's mother generally carries a bouquet of coloured flowers. The bridegroom presents it to her.

SORROWFUL ANNIE.—If your statement is true in spirit and in word, your husband is certainly behaving very shabbily towards you, and is sowing a future harvest of sorrows and remorse for himself. You could not get a divorce on such grounds as those you state. You must, like many another ill-used wife, do the best you can, and leave the result to Providence.

PERPLEXITY.—Sleeplessness is a very common effect of much worry and work. I can only recommend you to take plenty of exercise and fresh air, and pay attention to your diet. Do not eat heavy suppers; but remember, at the same time, that it is just as fatal to a night's rest to go to bed fasting as to eat more than is necessary. A tepid bath, if you can get it, is a capital sleep-inducer.

GALATEA.—The annoyance you complain of is very provoking, but you cannot take the law into your hands and kill animals belonging to your neighbour; you can sue him for the damage done by them. Such matters are always best settled amicably, if possible, and the gentleman you complain of must be very unreasonable if he does not try and prevent his pets from spoiling your flower-beds.

JESSIE.—Camphorated oil is very simply made, and may be prepared at home, after this recipe:—Camphor, 1 ounce; olive oil, 4 fluid ounces. Dissolve by gentle heat and use as desired.

WISCONSIN.—Hard water will destroy pretty complexions, as will fretfulness of spirit. A lotion which is delightfully cleansing is made of four ounces of alcohol, one ounce of ammonia, and one drachm of oil of lavender. Add a teaspoonful to a basin of water.

FRANCES.—To fill out hollows in the neck requires a perseverance that is put together with steel braces and copper rivets. It is a long task, and not always a successful one. Deep breathing and vocal culture frequently result in a cure. Rubbing with lanoline every night is good, but more effective when a cold sponging follows in the morning. Any exercise that will bring into play the muscles of the chest will have a plumping effect.

Mrs. H. B.—I will suggest some remedies to increase your weight, but at the beginning must say that if your thinness is the result of some organic disorder, this must be treated first. Then drink plenty of pure, fresh water. Do not drink tea, and substitute for it chocolate and cocoa, taken moderately rich and at frequent intervals. Coarse breads may be accepted, also cereals. Eat nourishing foods, and take plenty of exercise. If necessary, ask your physician to give you a tonic to build up the system.

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reproduced by the Company.

AMY.—Place no faith in fortune-tellers. They are the most arrant humbugs, and only silly people devote their time and money in listening to their so-called predictions. I cannot account for the "extraordinary powers" of the one you visited, in rehearsing for you some notable events of your career; but it is likely that her knowledge of your life may have been gained from a confederate who is intimately acquainted with you. The tricks of fortune-tellers are as numerous as those of professional gamblers.

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THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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